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MS-603: Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945-1992.

Series C: Interreligious Activities. 1952-1992

Box 13, Folder 2, Black Hebrew Israelites, 1978-1979.

January 30, 1979

A. James Rudin

Inge Lederer Gibel

I thought you would be interested in this excellent series on the Black Hebrew sect in Israel. Based on my own meeting with them, I think the team that researched this did an eminently fair job and you'll be interested in the comparison to other cults.

ILG/es

Enclosures

cc: Judith Banki  
Milton Ellerin  
Haskell L. Lazere/Steve Denker  
Marc H. Tanenbaum ✓

## NEWSBEAT

## THE ROOTS OF A CULT

THE LIVES of blacks in America's urban ghettos are a tale of poverty, racism, crime and squalor. Frequently, therefore, they seek refuge in religion and messianic cults.

Such a cult was the Jonestown People's Temple in Guayana where, two months ago, over 800 members died in a ritual mass suicide.

The shocking event has raised questions about cults in general — in the U.S. there are said to be 8,000 religious and non-religious cults. In Israel it has raised questions about the 1,400 Black Hebrews who have come to the country during the last 10 years. The largest concentration is in Dimona, but members of the

sect also live in Arad, Mitzpe Ramon and Eilat.

Israeli governments throughout these 10 years have failed to develop a clear policy regarding the group. At first the authorities treated them with benign neglect. But as their numbers grew, and as their presence caused concern in the Negev towns where they concentrated, the authorities were deterred from any extreme action — such as deportation — by fear of antagonizing Blacks in America.

Three months ago the Minister of the Interior appointed a commission to examine the situation of the Black Hebrews. This commission, headed

by NRP Knesset Member David Glass, must come up with a solution. For the local authorities in Dimona and Arad are no longer prepared to accept the status quo.

The Black Hebrews are equally dissatisfied. They want to be relocated in a settlement of their own. So far the Ministry has not been prepared to recommend such resettlement of the group, most of whom are in Israel illegally and are American citizens.

A team of *Jerusalem Post* reporters — Joan Borsten, David Richardson, Zvi Ben Nahum — has in recent weeks investigated the Black Hebrews and their problems.

The team was hampered by the reluctance of the authorities, including the police and the Interior Ministry, to cooperate with this fact-gathering effort. But it was spurred by the allegations of neighbours and former cult members, who expressed fears about the cult's values, behaviour and control over its members, and by local officials in Dimona and Arad who want the Black Hebrews removed from their towns.

In a series of five articles, including an interview by Harry Wall, with the cult's leader, Ben-Ami Carter, *The Jerusalem Post* will try to present the facts and the issues.

"Were we prophets? How were we to know that so many would want to come here?" — Yehudit Huebner, Deputy Director General of the Interior Ministry, January 1979

THE BLACK HEBREWS are a relatively small and obscure group by American standards.

Secretive and insular, they are ruled by a charismatic leader who has given them a new, purposeful identity by promising them utopia.

The group emerged in Chicago in the early 1960s, when several ghetto evangelists began preaching Black nationalism grafted onto a form of Judaism as a way out of the Black American predicament. They maintained that Black was not only beautiful but also the colour of the revered Old Testament patriarchs who formed a covenant with God.

Ben-Ami Carter and Shaleak Ben-Yehuda, founders of the Black Hebrews, went a step further and advocated Black Zionism. The forefathers of their followers had not kept "the law," they said, and had consequently been punished with exile and slavery. Now, in anticipation of Armageddon, all Black Hebrews must return to their original homeland, Israel.

Operating out of the Abeita Hebrew Cultural Centre on 47th and Cottage Grove, the two men successfully proselytized several hundred Black Christians, Black Muslims, and Blacks who considered themselves Jews but for the most part had not converted. By July 1967 they had persuaded 184 believers to "sell all their worldly

possessions, pick up their crosses, and accept the guidance of their prophecies by moving to Liberia."

"Just as our people when they came out of ancient Egypt could not enter directly into Israel," Carter explained several years ago, "also at the end of this captivity we could not enter directly into Israel. There were certain mores of the decadent society of America — modern Egypt — which had to be cast off in the wilderness."

There were defections. But most of the group, which settled on a 1,200-dunam tract 80 miles from Monrovia, weathered two years of Liberia's shaky economy, primitive conditions, and attempts by government officials to deport them.

Carter and Shaleak used the African sojourn to help the group "shake off the shackles of Negrolism."

They strengthened their followers morally and spiritually and transformed them from stereotype ghetto Blacks into a proud, cohesive, obedient "nation." They were distinct from other "nations" by virtue of their vegetarianism, strict moral code, colourful dress and Hebrew names; not to mention their still-evolving religious philosophy.

AT THE END of 1967 the cult leadership sent one of its members, Charles Blackwell, to Israel, "to spy out the land like a modern day Joshua." Blackwell, a former Chicago foundry worker who today is the head of the Black Hebrew community in Arad, went to Kibbutz Ma'abarot as a volunteer and

remained there for 18 months. He observed kibbutz communal life, probed the nuances of the Law of Return as it applied to Falasha Jews, learned to speak Hebrew fluently, and reported back — in the words of Carter — "on the ways and customs of the people currently living in The Land."

Then four other Black Hebrews — Willy and Tekla Butler, Gloria Verner and her son David — entered Israel in August 1969 as tourists. After a reunion with Blackwell at Ma'abarot, the five were brought to Arad, then a new development town being populated selectively, by David Malmon, head of the Arad Employment Office, and Uzi Halmovich, secretary of the local council.

The Blacks were given work and housing; every effort was made to absorb them into the community — even when it became evident that they were not, as had originally been claimed at the Development Areas Referral Centre, "Falasha Jews who had spent time in the U.S."

In November 1969, while their Jewishness was still being debated by the Religious Affairs Ministry, a second group, mostly women and children, appeared before officials at Lod Airport. Calling themselves Black Hebrew Israelites and claiming that their ancestors had been exiled from Israel 4,000 years ago, they asked to be admitted to the country as immigrants under the Law of Return. They purposely gave ambiguous answers to questions about their Jewishness.

Morris Lounds, Jr., a Black

American who wrote his doctoral thesis on the cult, believes that in asking for admission under the Law of Return, while not specifically stating that they were not Jews, the Black Hebrews thought they were being very clever. It was not their responsibility, the cult leadership subsequently told Lounds, if the Israeli authorities did not catch onto their ruse.

THE INTERIOR MINISTRY'S deputy director-general, Yehudit Huebner, who is in charge of the population registration department, recalls that the government was unsure of what status to give this second group:

"Most were women and children who had no financial resources," she says. "They told us they had 'come home' to be free and not slaves in America, and that they had been shown out of Liberia. We decided to investigate the matter and gave them temporary housing and three-month visas in the meantime."

In Dimona, the Negev development town with experience in absorbing Jews from various backgrounds, the exotic Blacks were welcomed with open arms. They were given 12 flats in the Nitzahon neighbourhood, as well as loans for food and furniture. The children were admitted to local schools and jobs were found for the adults.

Four months later — in March 1970 — a third group, claiming to be the fathers and husbands of the Black Hebrews living in Dimona, arrived in Israel. Among them were Carter and Shaleak. Interior Ministry of-

ficials had by then completed their investigation and decided — as the national press had before them — that the Black Hebrews were not Jews. However, since the Interior Ministry was reluctant to break up families, it allowed the newcomers to be admitted as tourists, stipulating that they were not entitled to housing privileges. The 70 men were taken in by the families already living in Dimona, and they caused considerable overcrowding.

Early in 1971 yet another group arrived. This time it was the Housing Ministry that assumed responsibility for the newcomers. The Mitzpe Ramon municipality was told that 11 "Black Jewish families" wanted to settle in the Negev.

"We took them gladly, with no thought to their colour," says Zvi Hagan, who was deputy mayor at the time. "It meant another lot of homes would be lit up each night in our town."

The group's ranks swelled as new recruits arriving from the U.S. on tourist visas were quickly absorbed. In October 1971 an estimated 250-300 Black Hebrews were living in Israel, most of them illegally. It was then that the Interior Ministry decided to take a hard line. Airport officials were ordered to turn back any Black Hebrews arriving without a return ticket or sufficient funds, and the Beerseba office of the Interior Ministry was instructed not to extend the tourist visas of those who wished to "continue visiting" friends and relatives in Dimona.

AS A RESULT new members arriv-



(Rubinger)

ed with round-trip tickets and sufficient funds, and virtually none of them attempted to renew their visas. The Interior Ministry then decided — in 1972 — that no more Black Hebrews were to be allowed into the country, but gave no guidelines on how to distinguish between cult members and legitimate Black tourists. New recruits circumvented airport screening by passing themselves off as tourists and pilgrims intent on "baptizing their children in the Jordan."

This led to lengthy interrogations and considerable harassment for all Blacks entering Israel — among them Bayard Rustin, (one of Israel's strongest supporters in the American Black community), and actor Lou Gossett (of "Roots" fame, who claims he was pulled from passport control lines six times and that a gun was held to his head). Even the world head of the Bahai faith was subjected to similar indignities.

At the same time, the Interior Ministry began to issue deportation orders and promised to expel "in stages" all cult members whose tourist visas expired.

Then, in December 1972, the Supreme Court ruled that the Black Hebrews could not be considered Jews and upheld Interior Minister Josef Burg's right to deport them — but also suggested that those Black Hebrews already living in Israel be permitted to remain. With that the

Interior Ministry took an ostrich-like stand, burying its head in the sands of bureaucratic indecisiveness.

Only those Black Hebrews convicted of petty crimes or involved in the Axe Murder (an intra-cult squabble which resulted in one Black dying from hatchet wounds) were deported. The others were left in legal limbo — without identity cards, rights or responsibilities.

When 68 Black Hebrews renounced their American citizenship in November 1973, the Interior Ministry ignored the situation, though the U.S. Embassy claimed Israel was now legally responsible for them.

Complaints from residents of Arad and especially Dimona about the overcrowded apartments (reportedly over 20 people per unit), overflowing sewage, excessive noise, and unsecured public facilities went unanswered or were investigated by one of several committees that reached no conclusions.

Meanwhile, cult members continued to get past airport officials and make their way to Dimona. And, according to one reliable estimate, there are at least 1,400 Black Hebrews living in Israel today — the exact number is unknown because they were never issued identity cards and do not have to register births.

Part two in this series will be appearing on Sunday.

## American Blacks, Jews intervene with Israel

By JOAN BORSTEN

*"The State of Israel is racist to the core...we call for a full boycott of Israel, its products, and its tourist ventures."* — Asiel Ben Israel, "Minister of the Hebrew Nation of Israelites," in an interview with the "New York Amsterdam News," October 1977.

SOON AFTER his arrival in Israel in March 1970, Ben-Ami Carter, the spiritual leader of the Black Hebrews, made it clear to Israelis that his followers were not, as some rabbis stated, "dark-skinned brethren who practised Judaism according to Ashkenazi tradition." No, they were Hebrew Israelites, a "nation" whose identity, culture, history and language had been stolen by those who call themselves Jews.

Carter announced to all who would listen that there was a world conspiracy to conceal from his followers their true identity as the original Hebrews of the Bible. At a series of press conferences, he laid claim to the Land of Israel "to the fullest extent of its biblical boundaries," declared that a million more Black Hebrews were getting ready to "come home" to Israel, and predicted that Armageddon would occur in September 1977.

After a period of catastrophe, pestilence, and famine, he declared, the Black Hebrews would be restored to God's favour and world leadership. From their capital in Jerusalem, "Northeast Africa," Carter prophesied, the Blacks would be a guiding light for the African continent and the entire world. He himself would lead them as the messiah.

Black Hebrews who had arrived in Israel before him and had become amenable to conversion were brought back into line, and friendships with "non-believers" were terminated. Any attempts by cult members to integrate into Israeli society were discouraged by Carter. Children were withdrawn from government schools in order to be educated in the ways of the "Kingdom of God." Relations between Jews and Blacks deteriorated as the cult appropriated public bomb shelters for classrooms, maternity wards, and wedding halls. The group's rock band, "The Soul Messengers," practised until late each night, ignoring complaints from neighbours.

The Black Hebrews also mounted what locals described as a "hate and terror campaign." After the Housing and Absorption Ministries refused to

allocate them additional apartments (because they were not citizens or immigrants), Blacks attempted forcefully to occupy several flats and then an agricultural site opposite Kibbutz Beit Kama.

WHEN THE Interior Ministry refused to issue special work permits for them (because they were in the country as tourists) 30 Blacks, watched by a television team and foreign correspondents, entered a Dimona supermarket, filled their baskets with approximately \$1,000 worth of goods, and refused to pay the bill. Derogatory remarks about the Israelis were coupled with anti-Semitic comments and charges that the "whites" were impostors.

The local press dismissed Carter as a trouble-maker and a crackpot, but in the international media the preacher made headlines as the spokesman of a group of Black "Jews" discriminated against by the "racist" Israelis, "forced" by the government to live 20 per flat, "banned" from public schools and public health facilities.

In the U.S., individual cult members who had been deported from Israel or turned back at the airport mounted a parallel public relations campaign, taking their

case to the Black press, the Commission for the Elimination of Racism, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Organization of African Unity, the Arab League, and the United Nations Ad Hoc Committee on Palestinians.

The "New York Amsterdam News," the largest circulation Black newspaper in the U.S., frequently reported the anti-Israel charges and supported the cult editorially. A Black radio station in Chicago devoted many evenings to the group and, according to one source, "made constant references to 'Brother Sadat' and his 'coming war to kill the evil beast,' while pledging further efforts to 'join the nation in Dimona.'

Israeli *hasbara* efforts in American Black communities were torpedoed. Moshe Gilboa, the Israeli Consul-General in Atlanta, complained that the "furor over the case of the Black Hebrews had harmed Israel's image among Negroes in the American South" and had also harmed "the good relations which exist between Jews and Blacks in the South."

THE ANTI-SEMITIC, anti-Israel crusade was documented by the Anti-Defamation League of the B'nai

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# Americans intervene for Black Hebrews

(Continued from page 1)

Birth in New York. Included in the thick pile of newspaper clippings — some from the "New York Times," "Chicago Tribune," "Chicago Sun Times," "Miami Herald," "Baltimore Sun," and "New York Daily Mirror" — are flyers published for dissemination in the ghettos; pamphlets, and a letter written in December 1973 to all Black congressmen by Shaleak Ben Yehuda, one of the sect's two founders and then the Black Hebrew's "Chargé d'Affaires" in Jerusalem.

"The Black Community in America should be aware that the government of the United States has allocated the Jewish State of Israel in its present crisis over two thousand billion dollars," wrote Ben Yehuda. "A great percentage of this figure consists of Black America's tax dollars. This has brought about economic hardships on Black Americans and has reduced the social programmes geared toward the Black community's survival. In addition, the eight hundred million dollars raised by the United Jewish Appeal for the recent Yom Kippur War was given primarily by Jewish merchants in America whose businesses survive solely from economic exploitation of the Black community."

Shaleak concluded with a call for the total economic boycott of all Jewish-owned businesses, the creation of a Black congressional lobby aimed at denying further funds to Israel "for use against Black Americans living in Israel," and "an immediate and complete investigation and release of Black Hebrews now jailed and held incommunicado in Ramle prison."

In his book, "Black Hebrew Israelites from America to the Promised Land," published in 1976, Ben Yehuda repeated — and elaborated on — these allegations.

Another item in the ADL files is an October 1977 "Amsterdam News" interview with Asiel Ben Israel, "Minister of the Hebrew Nation of Israelites," who charges that the 1,000 Blacks living in Dimona are "kept in total, complete isolation — they cannot leave, and any person who tries to visit them is refused entry. If they persist, they are jailed and deported as were we."

It is significant that this is the most recent clipping of its sort in the ADL file. In the last 12 months the Black Hebrews have refrained from attacking the State of Israel and its "racist" policies.

ACCORDING to authoritative sources, the Black Hebrews' silence is the result of a meeting held last November in Dimona with Bayard Rustin, one of Israel's strongest supporters in the American Black community. Rustin reportedly told Carter to change his tone, and promised to take the cult's case to his friends at the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Conference, and the ADL.

In February 1978, rather than lose Rustin's support, the three Jewish organizations took the unprecedented step of writing a critical letter to Interior Minister Burg. (Some ADL leaders, among them Arnold Forster, general counsel, opposed their organization's decision to write the letter, saying the Black Hebrews were an internal Israeli affair.) Stating that the Black Hebrew problem "has already been utilized by enemies of Israel to falsely raise allegations of racism and to embarrass Black Americans who have been outspokenly committed to Israel's support," the letter outlined a series of recommendations:

- The community should be allowed to join the Histadrut (and be entitled to all the employment, medical and cultural benefits, including

assistance with the booking and business aspects of the "Soul Messengers."

- There should be a discussion with the Interior Ministry as to the feasibility of relocating the Black Hebrews on a kibbutz where they could produce "vegetarian food" for the cities of Israel.

- Former members of the Dimona community who have been deported, but still have wives and children in Dimona, should be allowed brief visits to their families prior to the resolution of the problem.

- Both the government and the leadership of the Dimona community should refrain from making critical statements for a period of six months.

As a result of this letter, which was never acknowledged by Burg, the Histadrut extended membership facilities to the Black Hebrews. And on March 7, 1978, a thoroughly reformed, conciliatory Shaleak Ben Yehuda (author of the 1973 letter to Black congressmen), informed Rustin and "other participants in the Dimona conference" that "both communities in the land of Israel...are now coming together in one spirit, a spirit of righteousness...moving in this direction our communities can be goodwill ambassadors in Israel and the Jewish communities, speaking in synagogues on an international level throughout the world."

The Shaleak memorandum states that the Black Hebrews:

- accept Histadrut membership "as a show of devotion at this point in our history";
- wish to be accepted fully as citizens of the State of Israel with all the rights and responsibilities this implies;
- agree to insist that any new members go through the "normal immigration" procedures required of all new citizens of Israel;

- agree to refrain from critical comments for seven months.

Bernard Resnikoff, the Israel representative of the American Jewish Committee, attributes the Black Hebrews' volte-face to a genuine change in attitude. Carter, says Resnikoff, is not the same belligerent spokesman of two years ago. Now he is friendly, affable, pacific, reasonable.

Both Forster, who has interviewed the Black Hebrews for American radio and visited them in Dimona, and Zev Furst, director of the ADL's Israel office, have not been convinced that "any meaningful change has occurred in the attitude of the Black Hebrews toward Israel and the Jews." "We wish it were otherwise," says Furst.

The third instalment of this series will appear tomorrow.

JERUSALEM POST  
January 22, 1979

## NEWSBEAT/Black Hebrews III

# Cult's critics charge secrecy, strictness and 'brainwashing'

Jerusalem Post Staff

**THEIR GRACEFUL**, turbaned women, clad in modest ankle-length gowns, radiate an inner peace. The tall, athletic men, wearing distinctive knitted skullcaps and fringed African-style dashikis, perform even the most menial of tasks with a sense of purpose. The children are carbon copies of their exotic parents — happy, healthy and bursting with self-confidence.

Yet interviews with former cult members, interviews with some of the Americans, Israelis, and Black Jews who have been allowed to observe the community, indicate that life in the Black Hebrews' "Kingdom of God" may not be all that sublime. The rules are strict, compliance mandatory, dissent not tolerated, and discipline severe. In the past two years there have been claims, some of which have reached the press, of unresolved disappearances, involuntary confinement, child brutality, confiscated resources and passports, and extreme paranoia among the sect's leadership.

"At first being with the Dimona group was very good," remembers M. a former Black Hebrew. "I thought it would work out. Most people were like me, black Jews or blacks who considered themselves Jews. What we wanted was to stay in the Land. I don't know about the others, but even in the States I did quite a bit to campaign for Israel when it first got started.

"Things started to change a few years before that 1977 deadline, which they said was going to mean the end of the world (Ben-Ami Carter, spiritual leader of the Black Hebrews had predicted a War of Armageddon which would destroy the forces of evil and restore his sect to world power). The place got crowded with lots of newcomers, different from us. They started crowning Carter messiah, putting his picture up on the wall. They'd tell people to believe in them and what they were doing, brainwashing them, getting their minds and controlling them. They'd get on you real bad.

"They started this polygamy

thing, letting the men take up to seven wives, and never letting the old wives get used to it. People were beaten if they whined about going to work or if they were lazy. Children, too. Or they'd tell them 'go' and put them out for 40 days to wander in the desert. Or we'd all go to this mountain near Dimona and he'd make the people step forward, if they'd been asking 'why this' or 'why that'. You can't ask questions. A lot goes on you just aren't supposed to know about. Carter would pretend he was going to run those people out. Then they'd start crying and saying, 'someone have mercy upon me'."

Other observers of the sect also noted that the group has changed significantly since members first arrived in Israel in late 1969. Some of those who preceded Carter to Israel, for instance, considered themselves Jews and some even had agreed to undergo halachic conversion.

It is also clear that, until at least 1973, the Black Hebrew communities in Arad and Mitzpe Ramon functioned autonomously from Dimona. Arad was even considered by some observers to be a breakaway group. It was friction among the three communities that led to the 1972 "Axe Murder." Cult members from Arad and Mitzpe Ramon, wanting to join Carter, were rejected on the grounds that a new influx of believers would "aggravate" Dimona's problems. A clash, involving six Black Hebrews, followed and resulted in the death from hatchet wounds of Cornell Kirkpatrick. Relations were apparently so strained following the murder that some Black Hebrews in Arad and Mitzpe Ramon asked the Israeli police for protection against their fellow sectarians from Dimona.

It seems that only after the murder did Carter and his second-in-command, Ben-Yehuda, move to consolidate the three Black Hebrew communities under one rule. They brought in new recruits loyal to their philosophy and encouraged the departure of those who could not make the transition from Black Jew (a religion) to Black Hebrew (a nationality). Many left the group. At the same time, Carter, proclaiming

himself the "messiah born of the spirit with no mother like other mothers," and Ben-Yehuda, "endowed by the Holy Ghost," tightened their hold over the group.

They became stricter about matters of dress and drugs. Cigarettes and liquor (except wine) were forbidden. In Liberia, the members had become quasi-vegetarians. Now they were prohibited from eating fowl, fish, meat, dairy products, refined sugar, or soy. Everyone was expected to fast on the Sabbath, from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. Movies were banned because of excessive sex and violence.

Gentle or "slave" names were dropped and appropriate Hebrew names adopted. Many Black Hebrews do not know the original names under which their co-religionists entered the country.

The sect was also organized as a collective. Originally, the group had lived one or two families per flat. Now up to 20 people shared an apartment, pooled their resources and salaries.

"About that time they stopped letting you read books or newspapers or listen to the radio anymore," says M.

Cult members were encouraged to withdraw from all but essential contacts with Israelis. All outsiders came to be viewed as suspect, and in particular those who had "stolen" the Black Hebrews' true identity, namely the Israelis.

Morris Lounds, Jr., the Black American political scientist who wrote his doctoral thesis on the cult, had interviewed half of the Black Hebrew adults when he was accused of being a spy, although an unwitting one, for the enemies of the Black Hebrews. He was not permitted to complete his research.

An internal police force was organized to guard the Dimona flats. Lounds reports that the cult leadership believed the Israeli government, American authorities, and "forces of evil" were conspiring to bring about the cult's destruction. He also says children were taught how to behave in the presence of outsiders and drilled on the "correct"

answers to questions they might be asked.

Today, observers say, the Black Hebrews have so withdrawn into themselves that neither the Interior Ministry nor the police, nor even their neighbours in Dimona, Arad, and Mitzpe Ramon, can say with any real knowledge about the group's internal activities.

The authorities do not know the exact number of Black Hebrews living in Israel. They do not know how many children have been born here. Neighbours say that the mothers deliver babies in the bomb shelters under their flats while tom-tom drums are beaten outside to muffle the cries of women in labour.

The exact number of deaths of group members is not known outside. The Ministry of Health office in BeerSheva has signed three death certificates in ten years, but the Dimona chief of police, Uri Shalev, thinks there are about 20 graves in their cemetery outside Dimona.

The Israeli residents in Dimona's Shikun Nitzabon are generally reluctant to talk about their Black Hebrew neighbours. When asked, they complain about noise and overcrowding.

One Dimona housewife, who for eight years has shared a common entrance with some Black Hebrews, was more outspoken: "I just don't want to know much about them. Like everyone else here, I'm scared," she said. "I just mind my own business." She claims that some of the members have disappeared, and that she has seen bodies carried outside late at night. This claim was included in the High Court brief and was also reported to the Glass Commission. "We see people with their heads shaved. We saw a man the other day cleaning the patio area on his hands and knees with a tiny broom. It was his punishment for a week. But we don't know what's going on. They are really tight-lipped. They wouldn't tell us anything if we asked."

The daily lives of the sect members (900 in Dimona, 400 in

Arad, 100 in Mitzpe Ramon, and 20 in Eilat) are directed by a divine council of 12 "princes," each symbolically representing one of the ancient tribes of Israel. The princes are appointed to the council by Carter. Lounds writes that they are apparently subservient to Carter's wishes and that decisions are arrived at through consensus rather than by majority. The "divine council," it seems, is responsible for the continuous transfer of Black Hebrews between the three localities. (Israelis in Arad say that they have difficulty knowing the identity of their Black neighbours because of the frequent changes. One who lives above a Black Hebrew flat says that its occupants are completely rotated twice a month.)

In Dimona the group maintains an internal security force headed by a minister of defence. A justice minister metes out punishment to those who transgress the group's laws. An interior minister issues "temporary" identity cards that look official; Negev police have been under the assumption that the cards were printed by the Israeli government.

An education minister runs the "Kingdom School." Although Black Hebrew children are free to attend Dimona public schools, they do not do so.

The sect also trains its own midwives, carries out circumcisions, and administers herbal cures for various illnesses. Antibiotics are not permitted and diseases are treated by faith healing.

A finance minister is in charge of the communal budget. Observers of the group say that the revenue is derived from performances and record albums by the rock band, profits from the sale of jewelry and leather goods produced by the group, contributions from friends and family abroad, U.S. social security payments received by individual members, and paychecks from members employed by Israeli concerns. Some of the men work at Arad and Dimona textile mills, the Dead Sea Works (or "Live Sea" as it is

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## Cult's critics charge 'brainwashing'

(Continued from page 1)

called by the group), and in construction crews. According to some sources, new members are required to transfer control of their American credit cards, bank accounts and property to the sect.

Former members of the group have said that followers must also turn over official documents, such as passports, to the leadership. Black Hebrews who have left the group asked the U.S. Embassy to replace "lost" passports.

"Without a passport it is difficult for an American black to make it in Israel, unless he is living with the group," explains a source close to the sect. "By taking the passports, Carter has even a stronger hold over the members. The interior ministry never deports any Black living in Dimona."

Carter's deputies also control the activities of the group's branches in the two satellite communities. Charles Blackwell is the leader in Arad. He alone deals with the government, the police, banks, and landlords. The first Black Hebrew to arrive in Israel, Blackwell possesses a legitimate Israeli identity card.

The leader of the Mitzpe Ramon community is Gabriel Ben-Israel. There, male members are employed by the municipality to clean the

streets and gardens. Ben-Israel assigns the city Black Hebrew manpower and also collects all pay cheques.

When the Glass Commission arrived in Mitzpe Ramon recently on its fact-finding tour, it asked permission to meet with local members of the group. Permission was denied because Ben-Israel was not in town and could not be consulted. Neither Blackwell nor Ben-Israel can be interviewed unless permission is first secured from Dimona.

Many single black women join the cult seeking just this kind of extremely structured, highly-organized, male-dominated way of life that emphasizes a strict moral code. They themselves are often the products of broken homes and divorces. Some end up leaving, however, when they discover that among the Black Hebrews, women have status inferior to men and are separated, at least informally, during ritual worship and communal activities.

"All women are expected to do is cook, clean, take care of the children, sleep with their husbands, and produce one baby each year," says M.

In Dimona, Israeli neighbours complain about child-beating among the blacks. They report that

children, even toddlers, who innocently accept candy, ice cream or other forbidden foods from Israelis are beaten severely, as are youngsters who whimper or cry. "They start punishing them for crying when they aren't even old enough to know better," says one Dimona resident.

A professional in the health field, who has been close to members of the group, describes as child abuse some of the disciplinary measures meted out by cult members in an effort to insure that the children comply with the "Divine Behaviour." He claims that one child he personally knows was locked in a bomb shelter for a prolonged period of time, suffering mental damage as a result.

One former member was attracted to the sect because she believed the men would provide her sons with positive male role models: "They don't have crime or juvenile delinquency in the group," she says. "The problem is they are too strict. Half of those people are aggravated: they're in this thing, they've got to stay in, so they take it out on the kids. They never talk to a child. Right away they are ready to beat them. And when they do, they beat the children for hours," she claims.

Several Israelis have reported that members of the group who wanted to leave it were afraid of the conse-

quences. They asked Israelis for temporary shelter and help.

"We helped a woman who had been locked up once for drinking liquor. She was terrified," a former Sherut La'am volunteer in Dimona recalls. "She wanted out because, she said, the women there are treated like slaves. She was also frightened. So we hid this woman in our flat, supplied her clothes, and got her to Tel Aviv where an Israeli helped her leave the country."

A former member recently said that some members of the group would leave if they could, but are not strong enough to do so. "Some just want to live in Israel. They could work in factories, live in kibbutzim and farms," she said. "But the leaders got hold of the people's minds."

The Glass Commission is aware of some of these allegations, but tends to disregard them. Zvi Zilker, mayor of Ashdod and a member of the commission, said: "We aren't interested in what goes on inside the Black Hebrew community. Our frame of reference is determined by the appeal to the Supreme Court by a Dimona citizens committee. Our job is to find a solution that will put an end to the friction which has arisen in Dimona between the Israelis and the Black Hebrews."

(To be continued)

## NEWSBEAT/Black Hebrews V

# A settlement for the cult?

By DAVID RICHARDSON

*"In Dimona, where the total population is 25,000, we cannot ignore the presence of 1,000 Black Hebrews today, and maybe double that number in five years."*

MK Jacques Amir, mayor of Dimona,  
January 1979

ISRAEL'S Black Hebrew communities live as a nation within a nation, apparently accountable to no one except their messianic leader, Ben-Ami Carter.

For years their neighbours have

complained about the noise they make, the overcrowded apartments, the overflowing sewers, and the decline in property values.

For years their pleas went unanswered.

Finally, seven months ago, convinced that the Interior Ministry had finally crossed the line between benign neglect and irresponsibility, a Dimona citizens' committee filed a suit in the Supreme Court against the Ministers of the Interior, Health, and Education as well as the Dimona Municipality.

The suit was — ironically — endorsed by the Blacks themselves

who were equally anxious to resolve the dilemma, preferably by being relocated in an agricultural settlement of their own.

The court did not act directly on the suit. Instead, it recommended that Interior Minister Yosef Burg establish a fact-finding commission to look into the matter and recommend what steps the government should take.

Burg subsequently appointed a commission headed by MK David Glass who in the last two months has visited Dimona, Arad, and Mitzpe Ramon to gather information from local residents and officials, as well as the sect leaders.

The commission was also presented with two police intelligence reports on the group. One of the reports, leaked to the press a few weeks ago, recommended that the group be deported because of the "criminal activities and associations" of the members.

Glass claims that the police reports were largely based on suppositions, and not on any intimate knowledge of the secretive sect. He attaches considerably more importance to the opinion of the local police chiefs in Dimona and Arad who say that they have not found anything "dangerous or subversive" about the group.

A high-ranking official in national police intelligence, however, has admitted to *The Jerusalem Post* that rumours of criminal activities by the group have "never been properly investigated, as the Black Hebrews are not viewed as a major priority."

WHAT THE GLASS Commission has learned, however, is that residents' complaints only point to the tip of an iceberg. The ramifications of the problems are far more complex and serious, embracing social, legal,

(Continued on page 4, col. 3)

(Continued from page 1)

racial and, ultimately, political problems such as the sensitive issue of settlement.

In a discussion with *The Post*, Glass elaborated on the options facing his commission.

The first is not to do anything that radically affects the *status quo*. This would be the least desirable (although not the most improbable) decision as far as the Israelis of Arad, Dimona, and Mitzpe Ramon and the Blacks themselves are concerned.

An alternative is to remove the Blacks from their congested quarters and disperse them throughout Israel. But this, too, is unacceptable to the group as it does not take into account their communal life style.

A third possibility is to deport them from Israel. This is the least probable option as expulsion would almost certainly provoke protests here and abroad. "As a Jew, I find it difficult to accept that our people who suffered for generations because they were a strange minority would behave in such a fashion," says Glass.

The final option is to give the Black Hebrews the agricultural settlement they first asked for in 1971.

*The Post* has learned that the Glass Commission is in fact likely to recommend this. Glass himself is said to have reached an agreement with sect leader Ben-Ami Carter that, in exchange for the establishment of a settlement, and the rights and privileges of Israeli residency, Carter would guarantee that no new members would be allowed to join the group.

Underlying the commission's approach is an acute awareness of the racial ramifications of the problems, which transcend Israel's borders and affect relations between the Black and Jewish communities in the U.S.

The Israeli government's position — or lack of one — has prompted charges of discrimination and racism by the Black Hebrews and their American supporters. The deportation of illegal immigrants and the harassment of innocent Black tourists who were suspected of

planning to join the sect have fuelled anti-Israel sentiment in the American media, which have generally portrayed the Black Hebrews as a harmless group who want to exercise their rights as Jews and live in Israel.

The government is sensitive to the nuances of the problem in the U.S. and Glass has met with representatives of American Jewish organizations as part of his commission's inquiry.

Bernard Resnikoff, the local representative of the American Jewish Committee, says: "It is proper for a sovereign state to think through the international implications of its decisions."

In Israel, sympathy for the plight of the sect has been diminished by their steadily mounting demands for the privileges of legal residence without a willingness to assume the concomitant obligations.

It seems clear that the Black Hebrews are not interested in serving in the army, attending government schools, paying taxes, or abiding by public health regulations. Several Israeli officials interviewed by *The Post* say that they suspect criminal behaviour within the secretive cult, doubt their loyalty to the state and would like to see them deported immediately.

Glass, who opposes expulsion, mentions the legal problem that this would create. "Many of the Black Hebrews have unilaterally renounced their American citizenship and have destroyed their passports in certain cases. Technically, they are stateless and expulsion begs the question, 'Where to?'"

Not back to the United States. At least not the 66 sect members who have formally renounced their American citizenship at the U.S. embassy in Tel Aviv. (Destroying passports is irrelevant and insufficient for forfeiting citizenship. According to a senior consular official at the embassy, the United States is not at all reluctant to take back anyone who has not renounced his citizenship.)

But the stateless blacks are

Israel's problem. This raises the question: Why should the host country be responsible for keeping an alien who remains in the country illegally and decides to relinquish his citizenship?

According to the consular official, the U.S. embassy sees the problem of the Black Hebrews as "an internal matter" which Israel must solve. The embassy can only act as an intermediary in bringing some of the complaints of the group to the attention of the Israeli authorities, said the official.

The official acknowledged that the embassy does keep in touch with the group — a consular officer periodically visits them in Dimona — but only because "it is a sizable concentration of Americans living in Israel."

One aim of the visits to Dimona is to investigate appeals by U.S. citizens that family members have left home and may be living with Black Hebrews in Israel.

WHILE THE Glass Commission has been thorough in investigating the group's relations with the surrounding communities and the international dimensions of the problem, it has not shown an equal interest in probing the Black Hebrews' internal affairs.

Glass believes that allegations of bizarre cult behaviour, harsh discipline, and cruelty to members are largely unfounded. The committee is also not interested in investigating the personal backgrounds of the Blacks.

Yet there are those, aware of the Glass Commission's readiness to consider a settlement as a solution, who are opposed to such a step.

The fear that isolating the Black Hebrews in a desert settlement would only further remove them from the scrutiny of public authorities, making it more difficult to control their conduct. As in the U.S., so among these officials as well, the spectre of what happened in Jonestown, Guyana has had an impact.

But Glass feels differently. "I am

not in favour of comparisons with Guyana," he says. "That kind of talk can only reinforce such a process." Moreover, others note, there are similar sects within Judaism, and nobody is suggesting that these are potentially dangerous groups."

If the Black Hebrews are given their own settlement the state will be quite capable of controlling what goes on inside, he says.

If the settlement proposal is adopted, each member or family would be interviewed before being issued an identity card. "If anyone does wish to leave the group or has complaints about mistreatment, that would be the time to act," Glass says. He adds that any solution would have to include an "educational programme" as well, without elaborating.

Glass is also not specific about the group's practice of polygamy. He asserts that if they became citizens "the Black Hebrews would be subject to the state's laws, unless the laws were changed to adapt to the group's practices."

The commission has apparently already concluded its inquiry. Within a few weeks it will submit its recommendations to the Minister of Interior.

Certainly it is faced with a dilemma. A recommendation for a settlement would open a hornet's nest of problems. There would be criticism from various quarters about such allocation of land and resources. There would be fears about isolation of a strange cult. There would be serious questions of permitting a group to live in Israel which in its internal behaviour contravenes the law — as in the practice of polygamy — and the general mores of the society, however widely defined.

This, of course, has been the case until now, because of government indecisiveness. With a settlement, the government would officially sanction the cult and its behaviour patterns.

And if, as some officials suspect, the moderate political tone adopted by the group in the last few months is only an expedient ruse to help ad-

vance the settlement aim, there would also be considerable political embarrassment for Glass, the commission and the government, if after the aim was achieved, Black Hebrew leaders would in future again be tempted to resume their charges against the State and the legitimacy of Zionism.

On the other hand, the commission certainly feels the pressure of the residents of Dimona and Arad, who want the Blacks removed. They will no longer permit the Ministry of Interior to pursue its favourite do-nothing policy.

And it feels the pressure of the Blacks who also find their present circumstances intolerable.

Plainly therefore the question of the Black Hebrews can no longer be ignored. The government will be compelled to deal with it at the highest level.

Oddly, however, it will be called upon to consider granting support and legitimacy to a cult which shares the fundamental characteristics — as listed only this week in the "New York Times" — of most cults now under increasing suspicion in the U.S.:

1. They have a charismatic leader who says he has been given new, exclusive revelations about God or reality. Those who do not believe are considered not only wrong, but evil.
2. The leader creates a family, often a communal living arrangement. Members often take new names when they join and sever ties with their families.
3. The leader sets absolute rules, not necessarily following them himself.
4. The group has an apocalyptic world view, in which moral rules may be discarded in the service of the leader.
5. Certain behaviour-control techniques are practised, usually in a setting isolated from the outside world. Members see the techniques as a religious regimen. Outsiders call them brainwashing.

The oddity is the price the present government will have to pay for the failures of its predecessors — but Dr. Burg, the Interior Minister, will not have even such an excuse.

(This is the concluding article in this five-part series.)

## A SETTLEMENT FOR THE CULT?

# BLACK HEBREW BEN-AMI CARTER

(Continued from page 1)

Carter admits to being 38 years old, but he dismisses age as irrelevant because of his belief in immortality.

"We are phasing out death and are on the path toward solving the mysteries of everlasting life," he says simply. "The Bible shows that some of the prophets lived to be 900 years old. I am positive that, following the way of righteousness, some of our people will live to be 600."

Shifting easily from mystical beliefs to present concerns, Carter strongly denies all the allegations of criminal conduct in the sect. "They are completely false," he declares flatly. "They smack of the same kind of police attitude and discrimination displayed toward black people in America."

"If there is something to the report, why haven't the police come to us," he declares. "I say, check our record, and then put the cards on the table," his voice rising for the first time.

He does admit, however, that members of the sect have entered the country under illegal circumstances, using false passports or intentionally staying after their tourist visas have expired.

"When a man is fleeing from the land of oppression, he will take whatever measures he can to join the Kingdom of God." (This is the term used by the Black Hebrews to describe their movement.)

Carter compares the illegal entries of his followers to similar tactics used by Jewish refugees during the Mandatory period. "They had to throw their passports overboard when the British inspected the immigrant ships."

What about neighbours who claim to hear loud screams from the bombshelters?

"The shelters are where our women deliver their babies. Sometimes the mothers shriek from the pain," he replies.

Carter denies that members wishing to leave the group are held against their will.

"We do have some 'yerida'," he says, "but only try to stop drop-outs by moral persuasion. And if we can't convince them to remain, we will even take them to the airport."

Carter claims that the new members arrive in Israel impoverished. "All they bring are empty pockets, hearts of pain, and a multitude of problems." He disavows receiving large sums of money from the United States or, as has been alleged, from Arab nations.

"Our condition is known in high places and we do have people in sympathy with our movement. But we neither seek, nor desire, money from abroad. Money only confuses things," he adds. "But anyone who can, pays 'tithes' of 10 per cent of his earnings to the community."

Carter has repeatedly stated his belief in his group's ultimate ascendancy to the power structure in Israel. He is miffed about being left out of the Middle East peace talks. "How can (Jimmy) Carter and Begin conduct negotiations about the future of this land without taking us into consideration," he asks in all earnestness.

"The problem is not with the Egyptians or Palestinians," he continues. "It is that we are chosen for a special mission — to bring righteousness to the world. The first step toward that is the establishment of the Kingdom of God here in Israel, from which righteousness will emanate to all the nations."

The concern with "righteousness" looms large in Carter's thoughts and appears to stand for the set of beliefs that separates the Black Hebrews from the evil institutions and decadent societies outside.

The crisis in Iran was also predictable according to the Carter worldview. "Iran is caught up in the prophecies of God. The guiding prophecies from the Bible have taken the people there along their path."

Carter's belief in his ability to help shape world events has apparently grown with the increased control he has exercised in recent years to galvanize his followers.

"My role has evolved and changed progressively," he says. "I have a prophetic mission to fulfil. To establish the Kingdom of God."

Strong words from a man who, ten years ago, was a storefront preacher in Chicago's southside.

Very little is known about Carter's American past. According to an authoritative source, he was born Gerson Parker and raised in the ghettos of north Chicago. Following a trade school education he worked for a while as a metallurgist.

This information was discovered by Morris Lounds, the black American sociologist who lived for a time with the Dimona group and wrote his Ph.D. thesis on the sect. According to Lounds, Parker's (Carter) rendezvous with his prophetic destiny came one day in Chicago when an elderly man approached him at a water fountain and asked if he had heard of the ancient Black Israelites.

This apparently was the "sign" that moved Carter to organize the Black Hebrew movement at the Abeita Culture Center, one of the many evangelical churches dotting the Chicago ghettos. There, members were recruited for the journey into the Liberian "wilderness" in preparation for deliverance to the Promised Land. It has, from the beginning, been a fundamental tenet of the group that the first and only authentic Israelites were black people who were exiled from Israel over 4,000 years ago. It was the mission of the pioneering nucleus to restore the land to its proper owners.

Carter arrived in Dimona in 1970 with the third group of families and soon after assumed control as the self-designated messiah. "No man can pass into salvation of the almighty God except he come by the door. And I am that door," Lounds quoted Carter as saying. It is not clear why he changed his name to Carter, although Lounds attributed this to a belief in a mystical past wherein the sect leader had been reincarnated several times with different names.

The pattern of Carter's rise, then, parallels that of charismatic leaders of other autocratic cults. From obscure origins he has risen to a position of absolute authority, serving as guru and father figure to his unquestioning acolytes by means of an unchallenged claim to divine inspiration.

Carter's present concern is to get the group out of the overcrowded apartments in Dimona, Arad, and Mitzpe Ramon. "We would like to have our own agricultural settlement where we can raise organically-grown fruits and vegetables," he says. "We also want the rights and privileges of other citizens living in Israel."

Indications are that the Glass Commission (the public inquiry body headed by MK David Glass looking into the matter of the Black Hebrews) favours a similar solution, probably a settlement somewhere in the Arava. Under this arrangement the group would be given mobile homes, electricity, water and presumably the same government assistance extended to other settlements.

The commission would also recommend giving legal residency status to those Black Hebrews presently living in Israel.

In exchange for this arrangement, Carter has committed himself to

preventing new members from joining the sect. In a bid to stem the arrival of illegal immigrants. "We are the only ones that know who they (prospective members) are. We will keep to our end of the bargain," he declares.

Carter, who acknowledges to having three wives and fifteen children, sidesteps the question of stopping the group's practise of polygamy, which is contrary to Israeli law. "Polygamy is a negative term used by the West to describe a part of African civilization. We find it strange that a man has one wife whom he can't control," he says, criticizing the high rate of divorce in Western societies. "We do not permit divorce in our kingdom."

Would the group be willing to stop recruiting fellow blacks in the United States if given a settlement and legal residency as the Glass Commission may recommend? Carter affirms that it would and that, instead of proselytizing in America, "We will grow from births and by conversions to the movement by others who have seen the righteousness of our ways."

In previous statements to the press, Carter has declared that "there are two million Black Israelites in America waiting to come home soon." Despite this exaggerated figure there are probably many Americans who have been urged to join the Israeli community.

Carter is convinced that his prophetic messianic mission will ultimately be recognized throughout the land. It's realization, he avers, will not depend upon coercion. "Our movement will spread naturally as others recognize the righteousness of our ways." Righteousness involves adherence to the group's doctrines: vegetarianism, faith healing, abstinence from smoking, drinking alcoholic beverages and using pharmaceutical drugs, and complete isolation from the "contaminating influences" of the outside world.

"I am positive the nation will soon ask us to assist in the structure of the land," he declares. One of his first acts in office, says Carter, will be to close down the cigarette factories in the country.

What happens to those Israelites who object to the Black Hebrews' movement?

"Anyone who doesn't agree has a controversy with God, and not with me," answers Carter. "We are content to wait and live in peaceful coexistence with the Israelites, as ultimately they will see the wisdom of our ways and come forth to join us."

JERUSALEM POST  
January 23, '79

## Ben-Ami Carter: 'Ultimately the Israelis will join us'

By HARRY WALL

TO HIS 1,400 followers he is called, alternatively, the Prince of Peace, the Chosen Prophet, and the Messiah. To the Israeli authorities and the residents of Dimona he is known as Ben-Ami Carter, spokesman and undisputed leader of the Black Hebrews.

No real understanding of the hermetically-sealed cult can be had without some insight into the man who shapes its self image (and their view of the "decadent world" outside), is the ultimate authority over its rigid disciplinary and educational systems, and who offers peace of mind and eternal salvation to his troubled followers in exchange for their independence.

To interview Carter it is necessary to pass through measures of protocol not unlike those reserved for a head of state. Arrangements must be made well in advance through a "spokesman" and reporters are carefully screened for proper credentials.

"You would not expect to meet the

president of any other nation without strict procedures," says El Yakim Ben Israel in Dimona's Shikunat Nitzahon, where the group is headquartered. El Yakim, a tall and muscular former college basketball player, is the "Divine Minister of Finance," one of the sect's council of twelve elders appointed by Carter to administer the affairs of the "mini-nation."

The courtyard of the shikun is filled with the scent of raw sewage, the daily accumulation of densely-packed apartments housing 20 or more members per unit. Later in the morning the waste will be cleaned up by a sanitation crew of the sect, which has strict rules concerning personal hygiene.

On the concrete benches are seated young black women dressed in colourful dashikis and flowing jallabias, their blissful countenances striking an incongruous note amidst the squalid environs. Young males passing by exchange greetings in Hebrew flowing lyrically to the cadences of black English.

After presenting my press credentials, which are carefully scrutinized by El Yakim and another man, I am taken to a second-floor apartment in the neighbourhood and led through a curtain into a sitting room. It is sparsely furnished with a few wicker chairs, a small table carved from a tree trunk, and some African knick-knacks, remnants of time spent in Liberia. There is no indication of overcrowding as by day the sleeping mats are rolled up and the children are outside playing.

The room is spotless, and the aroma of fresh vegetables being prepared for lunch wafts from the kitchen. Carter is not there.

### Newsbeat/Black Hebrews IV



Ben-Ami Carter, leader of the Black Hebrews, with followers in Dimona.  
(David Rubinger)

The normally secretive sect members are even more suspicious as I had arrived the day after a national police report on the Black

Hebrews was leaked to the press, alleging bizarre behaviour and criminal activities by the group.

Following a thorough, but polite,

interrogation of my aims, I am told that Carter will soon be coming.

How, I ask, was Carter chosen to lead the group. "You know the deliverer by his works," El Yakim cryptically answers.

"What are the works?"

"He has led us out of the land of oppression (USA) and from the Liberian wilderness to the Promised Land," says the bearded sectarian. "And he has purged us of our bad habits and superstitions. He is our Moses."

The conversation is periodically interrupted by a young man, presumably in direct contact with Carter, who has additional questions about my visit. A corpulent woman quietly serves tea flavoured with honey (refined sugar is prohibited by the sect's dietary laws), and I spend the remaining time discussing the group's economics with the "minister of finance."

Presently, Carter enters the room unannounced, dressed in a blue dashiki and a white turban wrapped around his afro-cut hair. I am startled by his youthful appearance and delicate features, not what I had imagined for the omnipotent head of the group.

Carter is a handsome, bearded man of slight build, sharp profile accentuated by high cheekbones, and long, slender fingers. His almond-shaped green eyes radiate warmth and gentleness. His manner of speech is soft and precise. He chooses his words carefully, and responds patiently to questions. A man accustomed to deference, he bears himself with undeniable authority.

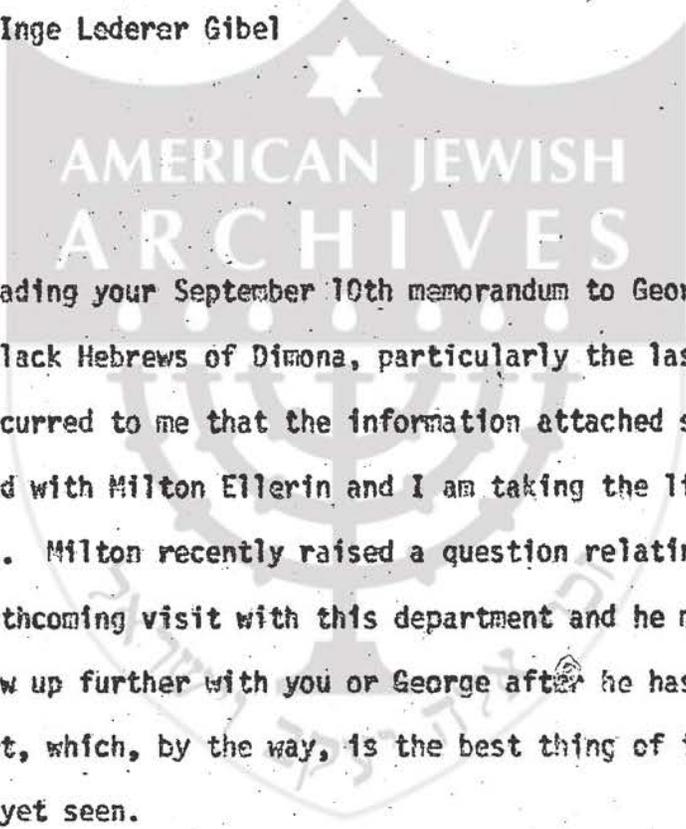
For the purposes of the interview,

(Continued on page 4, col. 4)

September 15, 1978

H. Bernard Resnikoff

Inge Lederer Gibel



AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

In reading your September 10th memorandum to George Gruen re the black Hebrews of Dimona, particularly the last paragraph, it occurred to me that the information attached should be shared with Milton Ellerin and I am taking the liberty of so doing. Milton recently raised a question relating to such a forthcoming visit with this department and he may want to follow up further with you or George after he has read your report, which, by the way, is the best thing of its kind I've yet seen.

ILG/es

cc: Milton Ellerin  
Bertram H. Gold  
George Gruen  
✓ Marc H. Tanenbaum

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M. Bernard Resnikoff  
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SEP 14 1978

September 10, 1978

George Gruen

M. Bernard Resnikoff

Upon my return to my desk from vacation, one of the things I found on it was a copy of your July 12 memo to Richie Maass, plus enclosures, dealing with the unresolved problem of the Black Hebrews in Dimona.

When Bert Gold was here he helped me see that, even though your memo was by then one month old, the issue is still alive requiring some follow-up attention.

Hence, this report which brings you up to date on everything to be learned here. The slight delay in the collection and transmission of this data was caused by the need to make time for a field trip to Dimona, as well as the return from vacation of the former City manager of that community who continues to be our most authentic source of information.

In terms of inter-organizational cooperation on your end, you should know that that portion of the attached report dealing with the trip to Dimona is being shared with David Clayman, American Jewish Congress representative here.

Please note especially the reference in the report dealing with unconfirmed but persistent rumors that expelled Black Hebrews, now in the U.S., are planning to return, ostensibly for the purpose of visiting wives and children, but this time in the company of respectable and nationally prominent American black leaders as a way of embarrassing the authorities into granting them a three-month tourist visa. In view of the way that, up to now, the Ministry of Interior and the police have stone-walled the situation, this could lead to further incidents, both here and in the U.S., about which the Washington office and the Inter-religious Affairs Department have correctly complained in the past. If the rumor can be verified, I believe the department and this office should mount a campaign of interpretation and suasion to avoid the ugliness which, for all we know, is precisely what is intended.

MBR:jw

cc: Bert Gold  
Washington Office  
Paris Office

✓ IAD



# REPORT

From the Israel Office of the American Jewish Committee

Rehov Ethiopia 9, Jerusalem 95 149 Tel. 228862, 233551 Cable: Wishom, Jerusalem

September 10, 1978

## Black Hebrews Revisited

Back in April of this year, Naomi Levine, then Executive Director of the American Jewish Congress and I called upon Minister of the Interior Yosef Burg, on behalf of the national community relations delegation, then in Israel. The purpose of the visit was to inquire why no response was received to a February 17 letter to the Minister co-signed by Naomi Levine, Bert Gold and Ben Epstein of the ADL and to press for a quick reply and an early solution of the problems resulting from the unresolved legal status of the Black Hebrew community in Dimona.

In that conference with the Minister, about which there was a separate report at the time, he showed considerable charm. For a politician he was also considerably frank by acknowledging that there was no response to the February 17 letter because he didn't know what to say. He did acknowledge that the problem persists, especially as the black Dimona community has mounted a campaign to swell its ranks by the infiltration of Blacks, in ones and twos, who, upon arrival, destroy their American or other passports, losing themselves in the community without any official record of their being in this country. Both Naomi and I encountered actual experiences of important American Blacks, including guests of the AJC, who felt themselves harassed upon arrival at the port of entry, and singled out for special interrogation by the police, with consequences leading to changes in relationships with American black leaders, many of them with a fine record of support for Israel. The Minister said he deeply regretted these incidents but insisted that Israel felt compelled to exercise the rights of any sovereign state, making discretionary judgments about who may or may not enter the country.

Months later, in a continuing consultation with the American Jewish Congress representative in Israel, David Clayman, it was agreed between us that Dave would take leadership in this matter, just as we agreed that I would take leadership in other matters, these decisions resulting from the agreed-upon areas of concentration on the national level. Consequently, Dave called upon the Minister once again at the beginning of the summer who, in effect, repeated his position stated back in April. He said to Dave that if we insist on a formal reply to the original February 17 letter, he would write such a letter in which he would indicate that the matter was referred to a committee but, once again with disarming frankness, conceded that there it would die.

More cheerful developments took place elsewhere. Following a telephone conversation between George Gruen and Alexander Allen, of the National Urban League, the League staff wrote George on July 5 to which was attached a June 20 letter from Ben Ami Carter to assorted friends in the U.S. complaining that "there has been no actual implementation" of Histadrut decisions

summarized in a March 2 letter from Histadrut Secretary-General Yerucham Meshel to Mr. Bayard Rustin. That statement may have been true at the time but it no longer is. I had once reported to George Gruen that part of the problem of implementing the Histadrut decisions was local bickering among the members of the Dimona Histadrut. That has subsequently been eliminated, based in part on pressure from the national office, represented by Mr. Paltiel Segal and I have in our possession in the Israel office a written record of the agreement of the local Dimona Histadrut to accept Black Hebrews as members of the organization, with the first members actually enrolled on July 3. Asked to abjure his charges against Histadrut, Mr. Carter acknowledged in writing on July 11 the "everlasting friendship of trust, cooperation and understanding with the Histadrut and its affiliated offices", specifying the successive membership registrations of working members of his community on each Monday, the day set aside for this purpose.

Encouraged by this data, but in the interests of getting a full picture of the black community of Dimona in all of its aspects, a field trip to Dimona was organized on September 6. The findings from this visit are appended hereto.



Dizona Field Visit, September 6, 1978

Arnon Loreda, Mayor of Dizona

The problem started back in 1967 when the first contingent of Blacks arrived from Liberia which, it should be recalled, was not that gracious to this small community. Exploiting the euphoric atmosphere in 1967, they were quickly accepted by Israel, and despite their claim that they were returning to their homeland, and, as a matter of fact, the first contingent was accepted as temporary residents. The situation worsened sharply and quickly when their claim changed from being Jews to being the original Hebrews. Tearing up their American passports upon arrival, and issuing their own "identity cards", they were seen as being without status and hence without privileges. They were not, and are not, eligible for free schooling, or social welfare services because, in a technical sense, they do not exist. The illegal practice of polygamy exacerbates the situation.

Guessing that the community consists of some 800 souls, Mr. Loreda denied that there is any race problem - pointing to the Indian population of Dizona which, by now, is some 12% of the population with no racial problem existing. In answer to a question, Mr. Loreda acknowledged that they do not violate municipal laws, but irritating problems exist. Example: the beating of a tom-tom two days before childbirth, to drown out the wailing, disturbs the neighbors. Another example, the way they live - sometimes eight or more to a room - has depressed property value and adjacent neighbors; wanting to sell their homes, complain that they are lucky to get 50% of a fair price.

Because the Blacks have no legal status, they are not eligible for work permits or work referral by the labor exchange. Still, many of them do work because of the general manpower shortage in the area. But they do menial work at the lowest rung of the economic scale. Those who do work benefit from social security and the other social welfare benefits generally conferred upon the working community. But, he concluded, if they want to live here, they must abide by the law.

Asked if he wanted some message delivered to his white and black friends in the U.S., he appealed to the U.S. that Israel has enough problems without being saddled with additional, unnecessary problems. Does this tiny, little country have to be a refuge for all kinds of people? Do we have to solve everybody's problems?

Israel Havon, Dizona Acting Mayor, representing NRP

Let's get one thing straight. This group is here illegally. No self-respecting country would allow people to stay on illegally, but Israel did, originally granting three month tourist visas. Would the U.S. have done that? I guarantee not.

Because of this basic fact, Havon, who was mayor in 1969, had to act accordingly. He was witness to a series of illegal acts, such as the infiltration of additional community members, with the result that the black community was creating its own society within the larger Israeli society. As a result, and fulfilling the legal duties devolving upon him, he issued orders not to admit children of the community into the school system.

Learning that I was scheduled to see Mr. Carter later in the day, Mr. Haven cautioned me that Mr. Carter is the only spokesman for the group, will not allow anyone else to speak to outside visitors and that, therefore, there is no way of testing the veracity of what Mr. Carter would be saying.

Avner Shitrit, City Manager

Mr. Shitrit's operational principle is this: the black community presents both legal and humanitarian problems. Until the legal problems are solved, he deals with the humanitarian ones. Thus, medical services are not denied to anyone needing and wanting them. Municipal services, such as garbage collection, are provided uniformly throughout the city despite the obvious tax differential.

Bisnona Blacks in the working force who are Histadrut members get the full range of services as do other Histadrut members. Here, some non-Histadrut members enjoy some Histadrut benefits.

In answer to a question, Mr. Shitrit described the community as quiet and law-abiding, generally.

Albert Abutbul, Head, Local Histadrut Council

Help was offered the first group of arrivals because they were admitted as temporary residents. Now, despite the legal cloud, the rationale for the continued offer of Histadrut services is based on humanitarian grounds.

The number of currently enrolled Histadrut members is about 130-140. Asked why the number isn't greater, Mr. Abutbul said because no more applied. But he did say that an exception was made in the case of this community and even unemployed workers are still eligible to join Histadrut, paying the minimal membership fees. And, he added voluntarily, he invited Mr. Carter in for a conference at which time he solicited additional membership but none came. Meanwhile, while Histadrut does not place people in work, or even make referrals, informal methods have been used to widen job opportunities for the black community and, on a note of triumph, Mr. Abutbul told me that there are now some 100 blacks working in the Bisnona textile factory.

In response to a question, Mr. Abutbul stated flatly and unconditionally that all the conditions enumerated in Mr. Meshel's March 2 letter have been implemented. More than that, help has been provided to the black community in a variety of informal ways; classes, folkdancing; trips.

Unlike the municipality, the labor exchange and the Iika, Mr. Abutbul acknowledged that Histadrut is a non-governmental agency and is therefore free to do as it sees fit without being bound by the lack of the community's legal status. Nevertheless, Histadrut urges labor exchange to hire people and certainly makes no distinction to services rendered to Histadrut members according to color.

Note: During the course of the meeting, there was the most interesting observation that, among all the generally positive reports from all sources

on this day, Mr. Abutbul was the only one to mention that there was a legal matter involving the black community that was on its way to reach the Supreme Court. This called for a separate inquiry.

Ben Ami Carter, the Prince Chancellor, Original Hebrew Israelite Nation

Unlike previous appearances to which this writer was witness, when Mr. Carter was bellicose, detached, aggressive and imperious, this time, he was pacific, conciliatory, friendly. Drinks were served by a ravishing beauty and his posture in his throne-like armchair suggested that he would devote all the time wanted for the consultation.

Mr. Carter acknowledged the veracity of the information I had been getting during the day concerning Histadrut membership. Yes, Monday is registration day and members of his community continue to register. Those enrolled enjoy full membership. While members of his community in Arad and Mizpe Ramon are experiencing some difficulty, here in Dimona things are going well. In fact, even unemployed members of his community are now eligible to join local Histadrut. In brief, Histadrut "has fulfilled or is fulfilling all the promises made."

The problem, then, is not Histadrut, but the labor exchange, which has been a problem for the last seven years and is still a problem. The exchange does not issue labor permits because of the legal problem. Therefore, those who got jobs, and only because of the manpower shortage, were paid less than others; now, however, with their Histadrut memberships, the salary level has become equalized.

Mr. Carter has kept his part of the agreement in full, has desisted from public statements and has issued a statement promising compliance with the law in all of its aspects. Still, at this time, Mr. Carter has no contact with any government official, the problem remains ultimately a political one, and the Ministry of Interior shows no evidence of wanting to get the problem solved. Nevertheless, Mr. Carter wanted it known that there has been tremendous change in the last ten years - and this on both sides. As far as his own group is concerned, there have been no more demonstrations, a public statement was issued that there is no wish to offend the State of Israel in any way and behavior is moderate.

Mr. Carter was just a little bit evasive about figures. When I asked him what percentage of his community are now members of Histadrut, he replied about one-third. How much was this in actual numbers? He didn't know offhand. He had to send his aide, Shamma, to the office to find out. The answer came back that there were 290 men, women and children now registered. (a far cry from the figure provided by Mr. Abutbul). In any case, the combination of the percentage figure and the number figure suggests a community of about 1,000 souls. (There is an interesting insight to be shared about the name Shamma. This is the first time I met anybody with that name. And yet it is a perfectly legitimate Biblical name - see Numbers 13:3. This suggests how the group views The Bible as its referent.)

Mr. Carter believes there has been a tremendous change in the last ten years. Certainly the group has discontinued its demonstrations and believes its

conduct can be characterized as being moderate. There is no wish to offend Israel but, to tell the truth, there has been no contact with any government official because the problem, ultimately, is all political. The Ministry of Interior does not seem to be ready to try to resolve the legal problem.

Asked what message Mr. Carter would wish to pass on to his friends in the U.S., he said that he wants to stress that his group is neither anti-Israel nor anti-Jewish. Its only objective is to do good. Current priorities include living quarters and jobs. As to the legal problem, the group would accept the status of naturalized citizens and makes the following proposal in all of its component parts: to be given a piece of land to grow their own food; to agree to maintain the present population level without increase; after a three year period, based on performance and experience, the group would expect official permission to allow a fixed population increase.

The conference was amicable in every respect.

Dr. Gershon Winer, former City Manager and now, Adviser to the Mayor

In every case of contradictory figures, the ones submitted by Mr. Carter are more accurate.

The court case mentioned originated out of the loss of property value on the part of neighbors adjacent to the black community.

Rabbi Ralph Simon of Chicago was involved in this community in its pre-Carter stage and continues to be an authentic source about the origins of the group.

## Appendix

With respect to the court case mentioned in this report, hard facts are difficult to get at this writing. The Ministry of Justice was not helpful. The legal adviser at the Ministry of Interior knew nothing about the matter at all, despite the fact that his Minister appears as a defendant in a case officially submitted to the Supreme Court, sitting as a High Court of Justice. The clerk of the Supreme Court knew nothing about the matter at the time of inquiry but promised to check and get back to us. There has been no response up to this writing. Finally, I called the Dimona lawyer representing the plaintiffs who, cheerfully and promptly, acknowledged that the matter was in fact brought to the High Court of Justice which concluded that there is no reason why the legal status of the black community should not be resolved. Consequently, the Court asked the Knesset Law and Justice Committee to formulate its recommendations as to how the matter could be settled legally. I told the Dimona lawyer that the matter required swift resolution, because the problem continues to fester, and there is now a rumor that some Dimona blacks now in the U.S., after having been ejected by Israel, are planning to come back to visit their wives and children but, this time, in the company of prestigious American blacks (like Mr. Rustin?) in order to safeguard their admission. Thereupon, the lawyer endorsed my own thought that it would not be amiss to encourage the Knesset committee to move quickly on this. All the more so because the high Court asked the committee to arrive at a decision "soon" without defining that term with greater precision. Hence, the letter to H.K. David Glass, attached.



September 19, 1978

M.K. David Glaz  
Chairman, Constitutional Law  
and Justice Committee  
The Knesset  
Jerusalem

Dear David,

I take the liberty of writing you this letter of urgency in consultation with my associate Mr. David Clayman of the American Jewish Congress.

It has been reliably learned from a variety of sources that the High Court of Justice has referred to your Committee the festering problem of the Black Hebrews in Dinona with the request that your Committee come up "soon" with proposals for the solution of the legal problems concerned with this community.

You may want to know that the American Jewish community continues to have problems with the leadership of the black community in the U.S., many of whom have a fine record of support for Israel, who continue to ask troublesome questions about the status of the black community in Dinona. There have been some ugly incidents in the past and one warrants that there may be others to follow.

In our continuing effort to win support for Israel on behalf of defamed American constituencies, including the American black community, we urge you and your Committee to formulate acceptable proposals as quickly as possible so that this problem, with consequences for both human and public relations, now ten years old, can be solved once and for all.

Mr. Clayman and I are at your disposal to provide you with such background information as you may require. Meanwhile, we express relief that the matter is in your hands and we wish you successful deliberations.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. M. Bernard Resnikoff  
Director, Israel Office

cc: David Clayman

**THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE**

**date** February 3, 1981  
**to** Marc H. Tanenbaum  
**from** Judith H. Banki  
**subject** BASIC Report on Black Hebrews

CONFIDENTIAL

You asked me to give you a report of the luncheon meeting with members of the BASIC group. George Gruen's report (attached), which must have been written immediately upon our return from the meeting, is comprehensive, and I see no reason to duplicate the process.

I would add only one comment to George's excellent report. According to my notes and personal recollection, Charles Bloomstein tried to bridge the gap between Rustin's view of Ben Ami Carter and Joe Allen's, with a kind of interim position. In the long run, he said, he shared Rustin's assessment that the Black Hebrew community is "indigestible." However, to give the group every benefit of the doubt, and to test out whether Carter has really moderated his opinions, he believed the community should be assisted by granting its members temporary working permits.

Even Rustin does not believe that mass expulsion is the answer. He feels if the leadership of the community were expelled (after appropriate public relations preparation), the bulk of the membership would depart voluntarily, with some perhaps trying to integrate into Israeli society. This may be an optimistic assessment.

JHB:mr  
cc  
B. Gold  
G. Gruen  
I. Gibel

*Judy*

**THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE**

**date** February 2, 1981

CONFIDENTIAL

**to** Bert Gold

**from** George Gruen

**subject** BASIC Report on Black Hebrews

First the good news: At the luncheon meeting with members of the BASIC group there was unanimous and lavish praise for the invaluable help that Bernie Resnikoff as an individual and the AJCommittee as part of the "Jerusalem Committee" of American representatives provided to the delegation. They said they couldn't have done it without our help.

Dr. Burg assured the group that the airport procedures would in fact be modified to eliminate the impression of racism in singling out Blacks for investigation. This was not put in the report so as not to make it appear that Burg was acting in response to BASIC pressure. The other good news is that Dimona Mayor Jacques Amir was able to strike a deal with Ben Ami Carter whereby in exchange for turning over housing units for rental to Dimona Black Hebrews, Carter permitted 672 individuals to be fingerprinted and identified by both their original Christian names and their new Black Hebrew names.

Now for the bad news: At today's meeting it quickly emerged that there is a fundamental split among the members of the delegation as to what ultimately should be done. Rustin firmly believes that Ben Ami Carter is a dictator; that his present moderation is purely tactical; that he still believes he has a divine mission to inherit the land; that his adherents in the U. S. have recently opened offices in Washington, Atlanta and Houston and in several African countries in order to recruit new members to the movement; that these people will continue to attempt to join the group in Israel irrespective of any formal agreement to limit the community to present members and their children; and that the Black Hebrews are basically an "indigestible" element in the country and are creating a time bomb that will eventually explode. Consequently, Israel would be best off to expel the leadership who are conspiring to keep the rest of the community under their control. Rustin's big caveat is that this can only be done once Israel has established procedures that make it crystal clear to everyone that this is not a matter of racism. Charles Bloomstein shares Rustin's assessment.

The contrary position was presented by Alexander (Joe) Allen, who believes that while the group may be quaint it is making a positive contribution to the pluralistic Israeli society, is committed to non-violence and notwithstanding his original aims, Ben Ami Carter has modified his position and become pragmatic. There are many "nuances" for options between expulsion and complete citizenship. The interim recommendations provide a means of testing good faith on both sides. Lewis Carter III of the NAACP tended to agree that the Dimona housing-for-identification tradeoff showed Ben Ami Carter's pragmatism. However, he said, the leader of the group in Arad, Prince Heskiahu, still speaks in the prophetic rhetoric that Israel is ruled by an unjust regime and that in the messianic era it will be replaced by the Black Hebrews, who call themselves the Original Hebrew

## Israelite Nation.

The report avoided making recommendations on the ultimate resolution of the problem, ostensibly because this was a matter for the sovereign state of Israel to decide, but in fact primarily because the BASIC group couldn't agree. The practical recommendations in the report represent a unanimous consensus. (Dr. Archie Buffkins, who had to leave the group before the end of the trip, called Rustin to indicate that he fully endorsed the report. Marion Logan, who signed the report, could not attend today's meeting so I have no idea where she lines up, although in the past she was closer to Allen's than Rustin's assessment of the Black Hebrews.)

Rustin told me after the meeting that he did not expect the present Israeli government to reach any fundamental decisions on the matter before the elections.

The Jewish representatives at the meeting were not asked for any public action. Our offices in Israel could monitor whether the airport arrangements had in fact been improved. The one issue on which we were asked to help was to impress upon the Israel Government the need to issue temporary work papers for those who had been duly identified. This was an especially serious problem in the case of those individuals who had managed to break away from the Dimona group and wanted to live in Israel on their own. They face terrible economic problems and harassment from the police. If it were possible to make employment, housing and social services available to them, more persons might be encouraged to leave the Dimona group.

Bayard Rustin noted that the Ethiopian Archbishop was prepared to administer charitable funds for a social service program for those who left Dimona and that Rustin would try to raise some money for them as well. He thought the group of Black American Jews in which Katya Azoulay, Inge Gibel's daughter, is active could be a useful channel for helping the defectors from Dimona get on their feet and run interference for them with government agencies.

Consul Benny Abileah told me privately afterwards that there were legal problems with some of the persons who had left the Dimona group. The Israeli police see no good reason not to deport them, especially since some have resorted to crime to make ends meet. Because of the polygamy practiced within the community, it is often hard to determine who is legally in which family. One woman who left the Dimona community with her two children could not get U. S. passports or Israeli identify papers for them because Ben Ami Carter would not allow the midwife who delivered the babies to sign certificates attesting that the woman was indeed their mother!

Rustin was unhappy at the distortions in the U. S. and Israeli press coverage of the report and was planning to write letters to the offending papers. He had taped a radio interview on the contents of the report which was sent out over 140 Black radio stations. (We can get a cassette if you see a further use for it.) He is also planning to write a column that will be syndicated in about 100 papers summarizing the group's recommendations. (He was angry at the "distortion" in the Jerusalem Post story (January 28, 1981). I presume he objected because it highlighted one aspect of his personal views rather than the consensus report. Abileah reported that the Post and Ma'ariv had carried editorials supporting the report, but he had not yet seen the texts.

The group at today's meeting confirmed that through an oversight one paragraph of the Addendum upon which they had agreed was omitted from the report. The

paragraph in question is included in the New York Times story. It belongs after the second paragraph on the Addendum page and reads:

"Any closed community with a highly authoritarian structure tends to raise problems for a wider society in which it exists. This group has an ideology which sets it in direct opposition to some of the values of the Israeli society. For instance, their self-proclaimed messianic vision includes their supplanting the present legal Israeli Jewish regime. We can fully appreciate the concern and anxiety that Israel and Jews have given this peculiar ideology."

For your confidential information, Bayard Rustin told me that Prince Assiel Ben-Israel, the Chicago-based representative of the Black Hebrews, has appeared three times on platforms with PLO representatives and reportedly supported their position. Another source told me that Assiel has been implicated in credit card thefts and other crimes. Rustin said he would give me copies of hostile literature the group is distributing in Chicago.

I would suggest that in view of all of the above we continue to keep a low profile on this vexing issue. In terms of the American community, Black and general, let BASIC carry the ball, with us helping only where necessary to correct distortions in the media. The BASIC group did not request formal endorsement by us of their report. Our help in facilitating their inquiry has been acknowledged by them. If called upon, we could say that their report appears balanced and their interim recommendations reasonable. However, in view of the unresolved underlying issues, I don't think we should at this point recommend any definitive action to the Israeli Government. The BASIC group told us that in contrast to their last visit some three years ago, when many Israeli officials did not consider this a serious issue, now everyone they spoke to felt that this was an important matter requiring resolution. In this sense their mission was helpful in further raising Israeli consciousness on the international repercussions of this issue.

GEG/el

P. S. I am enclosing the Jerusalem Post story of January 28, 1981 to which Rustin objected and the memo sent out by NJCRAC.

cc: Andy Baker/Roger Nathan  
Hyman Bookbinder  
Eugene DuBow/Harold Applebaum  
Inge Gibel/Judy Banki  
Abe Karlikow  
M. Bernard Resnikoff  
Seymour Samet  
Marc Tanenbaum

# Rustin says leader of black cult is 'dictator'

By JOAN BORSTEN  
Jerusalem Post Reporter

Describing Black Hebrew leader Ben-Ami Carter as a "dictator," veteran U.S. civil rights leader Bayard Rustin told *The Jerusalem Post* that he would defend Israel's right to deport the members of the cult.

Rustin came to Israel at the head of a six-member delegation of civil rights and black leaders to investigate "human rights in Israel" as they pertain to the Black Hebrews.

The delegation spent 11 days meeting with members of the sect in Dimona and Arad, defectors from the sect, Israeli officials, and U.S. Ambassador Samuel Lewis. They presented their findings yesterday at a press conference.

The group urged Israel to quickly reach a decision defining the status of the sect, and also called on the government to issue work permits to sect members and to continue efforts to upgrade their housing.

Although Rustin accepts the delegation's report, he felt he had a "moral obligation" to speak personally about the 1,200 Black Hebrews living in Dimona, Arad, and Mitzpe Ramon.

"If a group of Nigerians had entered the U.S. illegally, refused to obey our immigration laws and practised polygamy, I don't believe a single civil rights leader would question America's right to deport them," said Rustin. "I feel the same way about the Black Hebrews and Israel. I will not let the question of colour obscure my belief in democracy and abhorrence of dictators. I will not engage in a double standard. If the Black Hebrews do not abide by Israeli laws and intend to replace the present order of things, they are a threat to the state."

Rustin said that he cannot tell the Israeli government how to handle its 12-year-old dilemma.

"Israel must determine whether Ben-Ami Carter still believes what he originally said — that he and his group will inherit the earth and that the Jews are impostors in Israel. If that is still the case, the Black Hebrews are indigestible. If on the other hand — as his current public statements indicate — he has changed his tune, the group is digestible."

(Continued on page 2, col. 7)

THE JERUSALEM POST  
Jan. 28, 1981

## RUSTIN

(Continued from page one)

Rustin personally believes that Carter is still bound by his original principles — which were expounded to the delegation once again this week by the head of the Arad Black Hebrew community, Charles Blackwell.

"I wonder," asked Rustin, "if in this kind of controlled situation (in the sect) Blackwell could possibly say what he did without Carter's permission?"

Rustin admitted that he has not been able to substantiate charges frequently levelled against Carter and his lieutenants by former Black Hebrews, who claim that their passports and bank accounts were impounded by Carter, that it was difficult to leave the group, and that families were separated as a method of discipline.

"But I wouldn't be surprised if it were true," said Rustin.

"Carter is a dictator and dictators don't have the same moral standards as democratic leaders. Hitler and Stalin were capable of doing almost anything."

"We cannot forget that we see only what Carter wants us to see," he said. "I did not see children with malnutrition in Dimona. But I believe members of the Baptist community (who say that most of the Black Hebrew children they have sheltered in past years arrived suffering from malnutrition). The Health Ministry should go in and check every child. It is not right that this group can deny any government the right to investigate what is going on."

What Rustin, like every other member of the fact-finding mission, did emphasize was his belief that the government could end the current untenable situation by diffusing Carter's control over his band of followers.

Instead of relocating the entire cult on an isolated moshav, as was recommended by the Glass Commission report, Rustin would give all Black Hebrews currently in Israel — including those who have left the group and are living on their own — the legal right to live anywhere in the country as long as they obeyed national laws.

In response to the frequently-voiced fear that deporting the cult would increase anti-Semitism among U.S. blacks, Rustin felt that blacks and Jews would overcome the anticipated tension as they had other problems.

Other members of the mission were Alexander Allen, vice-president of the National Urban League; Charles Bloomstein, of the A. Philip Randolph Educational Fund; Dr. Archie Buffkins, of the task force on International Higher Education in Israel; Lewis Carter, of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People; and Mrs. Arthur Logan, of the National Council of Negro Women.



January 30, 1981

*Memo*

TO: NJCRAC Member Agencies

FROM: Rabbi Israel Miller, Chair and Judge Jerry Wagner, Vice Chair, NJCRAC  
Israel Task Force

RE: News Accounts of BASIC Report on the Black Hebrews in Dimona

You will recall from earlier communications from the NJCRAC Israel Task Force that the status of the Black Hebrews (Original Hebrew Israelite Nation), centered in Dimona, was to be the subject of a mission to Israel by BASIC (Black Americans in Support of Israel Committee).

As you may have just recently read in your local papers, a mission of seven BASIC members spent eleven days in Israel and issued a report of their findings with regard to the status of the Black Hebrews and the related problem of Israeli measures to stem the influx of potential new members of the cult. The BASIC report (enclosed) can be summarized as highly positive in that it exonerates Israel of "official racism" (p. 3-4) and takes note that the Government of Israel has committed itself to improve the status of the Black Hebrews (p. 6-7) and screening procedures at points of entry (p. 4-6). The report sympathetically acknowledges the problems posed to Israel by a group that refuses to acknowledge the authority of the Government of Israel and the routine immigration and census procedures which are the necessary right and normal practice of all democracies (p. 1 and 8; General Recommendations 1 and 2).

We have enclosed a copy of the January 30 report by David K. Shipler in The New York Times which is a generally accurate reflection of the BASIC findings and recommendations. This article parallels most closely the thrust of the BASIC report and its sympathetic appraisal of Israel's dilemma. Unfortunately, however, some of the news stories and headlines we have seen discussing the BASIC report have been somewhat inaccurate or misleading. For example, the headline and lead paragraph of Wednesday's story in The Washington Post (enclosed) ascribes to the BASIC mission a position on the question of deportation when, in fact, as The New York Times accurately reports, BASIC "carefully avoided advising Israel on whether it should deport the 1,200 to 1,500 members of the sect or allow them to remain." The headline of the Baltimore Sun article is also misleading in its emphasis.

Recommendations

1. Where the local press has inaccurately reported or headlined the BASIC findings, local agencies should share the text of the BASIC report (and, perhaps, The New York Times article) with the appropriate members of the editorial staff of your local paper.
2. Communities should exercise their individual judgment with regard to sharing the report with other influentials and media people who might be interested in this subject.

\* \* \*

This memo, as well as the previous communication from the NJCRAC Israel Task Force reflects continuing consultation with an ad hoc committee of NJCRAC member agencies consisting of the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith (all three mentioned in the BASIC report and several news articles for their role in assisting the mission), the Jewish Labor Committee and the National Council of Jewish Women.

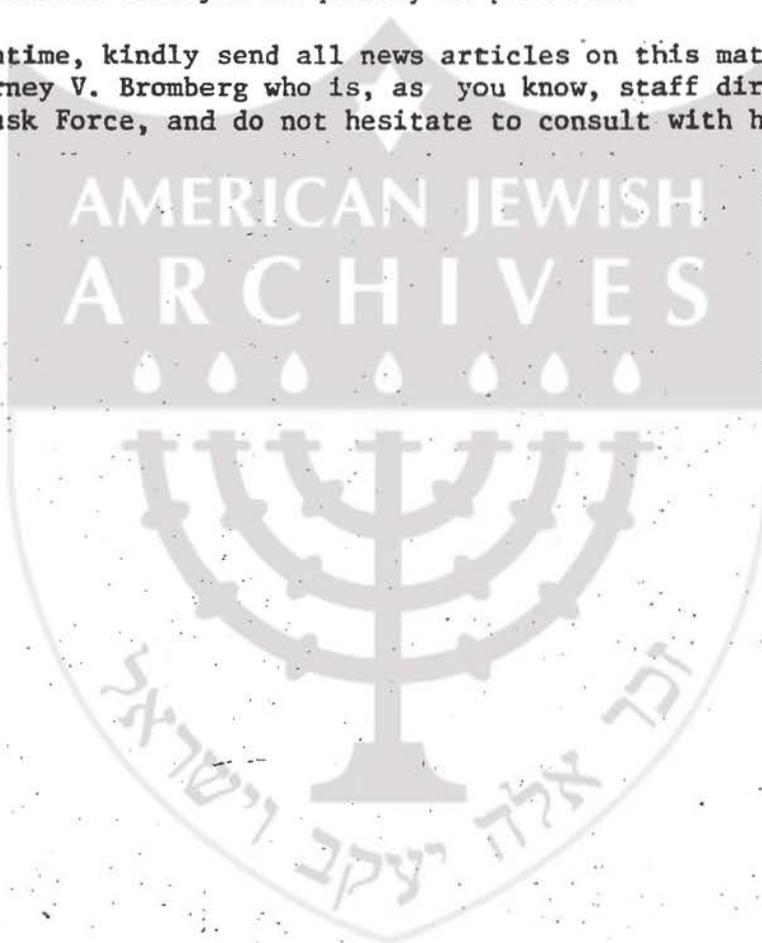
All of us will be meeting with BASIC on Monday February 2, 1981. Any relevant information or additional recommendations developed as a result of that meeting will be shared with you as quickly as possible.

In the meantime, kindly send all news articles on this matter as soon as possible to Charney V. Bromberg who is, as you know, staff director of the NJCRAC Israel Task Force, and do not hesitate to consult with him as the need arises.

IM/JW:gl

EX, ITF (NJ)

Enclosures





# REPORT

From the Israel Office of the American Jewish Committee

Rehov Ethiopia 9, Jerusalem 95 149 Tel. 228862, 233551 Cable: Wishom, Jerusalem

September 10, 1978

## Black Hebrews Revisited

Back in April of this year, Naomi Levine, then Executive Director of the American Jewish Congress and I called upon Minister of the Interior Yosef Burg, on behalf of the national community relations delegation, then in Israel. The purpose of the visit was to inquire why no response was received to a February 17 letter to the Minister co-signed by Naomi Levine, Bert Gold and Ben Epstein of the ADL and to press for a quick reply and an early solution of the problems resulting from the unresolved legal status of the Black Hebrew community in Dimona.

In that conference with the Minister, about which there was a separate report at the time, he showed considerable charm. For a politician he was also considerably frank by acknowledging that there was no response to the February 17 letter because he didn't know what to say. He did acknowledge that the problem persists, especially as the black Dimona community has mounted a campaign to swell its ranks by the infiltration of Blacks, in ones and twos, who, upon arrival, destroy their American or other passports, losing themselves in the community without any official record of their being in this country. Both Naomi and I encountered actual experiences of important American Blacks, including guests of the AJC, who felt themselves harassed upon arrival at the port of entry, and singled out for special interrogation by the police, with consequences leading to changes in relationships with American black leaders, many of them with a fine record of support for Israel. The Minister said he deeply regretted these incidents but insisted that Israel felt compelled to exercise the rights of any sovereign state, making discretionary judgments about who may or may not enter the country.

Months later, in a continuing consultation with the American Jewish Congress representative in Israel, David Clayman, it was agreed between us that Dave would take leadership in this matter, just as we agreed that I would take leadership in other matters, these decisions resulting from the agreed-upon areas of concentration on the national level. Consequently, Dave called upon the Minister once again at the beginning of the summer who, in effect, repeated his position stated back in April. He said to Dave that if we insist on a formal reply to the original February 17 letter, he would write such a letter in which he would indicate that the matter was referred to a committee but, once again with disarming frankness, conceded that there it would die.

More cheerful developments took place elsewhere. Following a telephone conversation between George Gruen and Alexander Allen, of the National Urban League, the League staff wrote George on July 5 to which was attached a June 20 letter from Ben Ami Carter to assorted friends in the U.S. complaining that "there has been no actual implementation" of Histadrut decisions