

Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity

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Real Jews

(for brothers fred hampton & mark clark, murdered 12/4/69 by chicago police
at 4:30 a.m. while they slept)

. . . were the street lights out?

did they darken their faces in combat?

did they remove their shoes to creep softer?

could you not see the whi-te of their eyes,

the whi-te of their deathfaces?

or did they just turn into ghost dust and join the night fog? **Haki Madhubuti**

There was no deceiving him [the slavemaster]. His work went on in his absence almost as well as in his presence; and he had the faculty of making us feel as if he was ever present with us. This he did by surprising us. He seldom approached the spot where we worked openly, if he could do so secretly. Such was his cunning that we used to call him, amongst ourselves, "the snake." When we were at work in the cornfield, he would sometimes crawl on his hands and knees to avoid detection, and all at once would rise nearly in our midst, and scream out, "Ha, ha! Come, come! Dash on, dash on!" This being his mode of attack, it was never safe to stop a single minute. His comings were like a thief in the night. He appeared to us as being ever at hand. He was under every tree, behind every stump, in every bush and window on the plantation. . . . He seemed to think himself equal to deceiving the Almighty. **Frederick Douglass**

Overseer, overseah, oviseah, ofiseah, offiseah, officer. . . . They both ride horses.

KRS-One

: : :

An Introduction to New World Orders, Officers, and Overseers

It is nighttime in Brooklyn, and law enforcement plays hide-and-seek in Crown Heights, hide-and-seek with itself. One moment all is silent, dank, darkly muted. The police, cloaked and camouflaged, surreptitiously pause before they pounce, waiting for some unsuspecting wrongdoer. And then, almost magically, like rabbits plucked from asphalt top hats, wailing sirens co-narrate the stories told by flashing lights of blue and red and blue and red and blue. This is Brooklyn, circa 1994: the same neighborhood that produced, one year prior, a disheveled and seemingly demented elderly black man, his voice trailing off into the distance, who screamed nonsensical numbers over his shoulder at me after his unprovoked, clenched-fisted attack ("seven, six, four, nine, nine, four, nine, nine, four, six, seven, four, four, nine . . ."). Hearing my recap of that strange incident, local residents mostly shrugged their shoulders or shook their heads and advised me to use those exact integers in the next week's Lottery drawing, just in case.

This is the Brooklyn I know best, where and when I first picked up that undoubtedly annoying (to some) habit of singing myself into contemporary pop tunes: "*You Remind John of his Jeep . . . something like John's bank account*," a habit I copied from a local weed dealer who could effortlessly fit his first name into the chorus of just about any song ever recorded.¹ My ethnographic séances with Hurston and Mead were inaugurated here, and I found my inner Anthroman on these same streets. From a forgetful perch in the twenty-first century, I look back now on this space and time with an almost intuited sense of history, a nostalgic chronology, something I can less safely prove than simply believe.²

This particular summer night in Crown Heights was sizzling, which meant that the tenants who lived in my mom's housing project complex, my informants, were hanging outside their stuffy tenement buildings in the moonlight, opting for the slightly lesser of two sweltering evils. Neighbors leaned their torsos against barred terrace openings. They dangled their legs from rusting fire-escapes, slouched backs against metallic folding chairs—all the while, fanning themselves with old magazines and newspapers, a mostly futile attempt to beat back some of that heat. I was also outside on this night, shuffling playing cards and fellowshiping with a few of the neighbors. Some of them I knew well; most I did not. Several other tables of card games were taking place at one and the same time; we all concentrated as much on the braggadocio from nearby contests as on the details of our own hands.

At midnight, while we continued fanning ourselves with an assort-

ment of printed matter, an automobile loudly pealed past us from the direction of Eastern Parkway, stopping abruptly in the middle of an adjacent intersection. Collective eyes crawled up from their games to see, as Stokes asked out loud (and for the entire group), “Whah de fuck is goin’ on out dere!”³ Stokes is a sixty-one-year-old man who has lived in Crown Heights for some fifteen years. Before that move to Brooklyn, he drove a cab in Harlem, where he was an occupational acquaintance (I would find out nine years later) of Bill and his clairvoyant wife, Gina. This was before Bill’s vending days, when he drove a taxi full time. Even before I heard Bill’s firsthand version of these events many years later, Stokes had told me about fellow cabbies getting held up at gunpoint—and even fired at by passengers. Fortunately, in Bill’s case, the gun did not discharge, which he took as a sign, never returning to work again.

Stokes has been in the United States for more than forty years, but he was born and raised in Jamaica. In fact, most of the residents I came to know in and around this specific section of Brooklyn were no more than one or two generations removed from places like Jamaica, Barbados, Guyana, Trinidad, and Haiti. You almost trip over people’s hyphenated identities whenever you pass them on the street—in this case, a thickly accented West Indianness that people drag around the neighborhood with them, diasporic crosses they most happily bear. These tiny sections of Brooklyn can feel like life-size replicas of, say, Kingston, Jamaica, only without a standing army or any of the bloody PNP/JLP conflicts.⁴ This cultivates a sense of transnationality that is almost contagious. As a child, I did not visit Antigua, where my mother was born, more than a few times, and then only for a week or two during several summers. Even so, in certain stretches of Crown Heights and Flatbush, there are moments when I feel every bit as Caribbean as I do “Yankee” (by way of my biological father from the American south). But not even Antiguan really, just Caribbean, which is an even more curious awareness of self. And in the parts of Crown Heights where Caribbean-Americans play card games on sidewalk strips outside at midnight, such fanciful cosmopolitanism might just make sense, especially when people are sending themselves, their money, and other family members back and forth across nation-state borders every month out of the year. Stokes, who had only recently returned from his last trip to Jamaica a few weeks earlier, continued speaking as the now silent automobile remained motionless across the avenue.

“Whah de hell is goin’ on in dis muddahfuckah?” he asks.

“You ain’t really asking, ’cause you know we nah know!”

The quick retort came from Kyrle, a forty-something former attor-

ney from Trinidad who drove dollar cabs up and down Remsen Avenue to make ends meet. He was the single father of a twelve-year-old girl, Darlene, and he also happened to be my Spades partner on that night—and not a very good one at that (“Bring out de dominos. I bet I’ll bone all ya!” was his defensive mantra). Kyrle and Stokes began to theorize out loud about the identity of the car’s driver. They first decided drug dealer, but then quickly figured that a hatchback Honda Civic was not nearly fancy enough; it would have to be a Benz or BMW—or at least a souped-up Honda Prelude. Maybe an undercover cop, someone else offered, but that suggestion was quickly dismissed, since it sounded reasonable to most within earshot when Kyrle claimed that government workers, undercover or not, have to use American cars, only a few skeptical naysayers silently shaking their heads to the contrary.

What happened next went very quickly. A man and woman, screaming and yelling at one another, spilled out of that vehicle and into the otherwise empty intersection. The unidentified man, pulling up the sleeves on a sky-blue Adidas sweat suit, slapped the woman across her face. From their perches on fire escapes above, folks yelled out for him to stop, or just yelled, and Kyrle stood up for a potential confrontation, but it would not happen, not today. Instead, the police must have been called as soon as the suspiciously screeching car made its entrance onto the block, because within a few seconds, cops arrived from what seemed like every conceivable direction, the once-silent block ringing out with sirens and flashing blues to reds to blues to reds. Officers surrounded the vehicle, put the man (now handcuffed) into the back seat of one squad car and the woman into another. They perfunctorily took statements from some witnesses and arranged, via walkie-talkie, for the now driverless car to be towed. After about thirty minutes or so, it seemed like their work was just about over, but the true criminal apprehending had only just begun.

The patrolmen slid back into their police cars, fastening seat belts and keying ignitions, when a deafening sound rang out in the dark night. It was a rap song, “Fuck tha Police,” by the Los Angeles-based group NWA (Niggas with Attitude). The shocked officers, looking more than a little agitated, left their cars and started to scurry (“like chickens wit dey heads cut off,” Kyrle said), falling over one another in an almost Keystone-cop-like attempt to locate the source of that musical disturbance. Once they determined its general direction, they moved in quickly—toward our set of tenement buildings. They dashed right past us, a blue flood flowing in almost poetic unison, and with a singular pur-

pose. They shot by our card table, almost upending it, as they barreled into the dim bowels of an adjacent building.

“Whah de hurry?” Stokes asked, laughing and shuffling cards. “Dem can’t take de troot?”

Ever Anthroman, my Anthrosense tingling, I made mental notes for myself about the number of officers (seven in all, two blacks), their body types, the configuration of their vehicles in the street (almost like an isosceles triangle), and specifics about the scowls and scars on a couple of their faces. As they passed, Stokes, Kyrle, and most everyone else simply continued playing cards: long after the police came back down the steps with their third handcuffed culprit of the night (Leroy, one of my childhood friends from junior high school in Canarsie), his now silent Aiwa double-cassette deck in one of the officer’s black-gloved hands; long after the blue and white police cars, those hide-and-seek cars, had taken off their flashing lights and disappeared back into the night; and even after we stopped commenting about the night’s festivities. Everyone continued playing card games and trying to beat the heat. It was summertime in the city, and the living had never been easy.

This chapter is about police and paranoia, about anxieties that breed cultural alienation. It evokes the real and imagined connections in time and travel that expose, say, officers who pass for overseers and local beliefs that confound commonsense assumptions about race, place, and cultural difference. These juxtapositions lay the groundwork for subjective distinctions between everyday sincerities and their authentic mirrors, between “crocodile tears” and the truest of sobs—even if parsing such a difference is only one more instance of that Bataille search for “the impossible,” a foregone failure as ethnographic mission.⁵ In this case, I am talking about impossible surprises from a Pandora’s Box of crosscutting and splintered spiritualities, ones not all that far removed from the ecstatic behavior of gospel-singing high school Hottentots. We are shifting, however, from spirit possession to secret societies, from concerts to conspiracies. Most specifically, I want to examine one variant of black Judaism as a particular slant on contemporary racial subjectivity, a tangible example of how racial authenticities fold in on top of one another, and on top of proffered sincerities, to rewrite our overly monolithic iterations of racial identity.

This chapter highlights some of the cosmological understandings that defined a particular version of black identity in a mid-1990s Brooklyn community of “Fuck tha Police” responses to excesses of the New York Police Department. In this case, I am talking about a Black Jewish

identity codified into a loudly conspicuous and nationalist rhetoric of absolute racial difference. The Worldwide Truthful Understanding (WTU) Black Hebrew Israelites in New York City are somewhat famous for their cable-access television shows and sidewalk spectacles, where they blare antiwhite oratory from soapboxes set up on busy city streets. These are quite certainly displays of black *masculinist* spirituality. Only men take part in these public performances of Black Jewishness, black men with deep baritone voices, full beards, and Old-Testament-inspired garb.⁶ In 1994 WTUers located spiritual subjectivities in *authentic* genealogies of racial reasoning, genealogies traced through anticop rap songs and conspiracy theories, conspiracy theories that ended up implicating the discipline of anthropology itself—and as much more than just a neocolonialist project.

For practitioners of this specific version of black Judaism, what you see is never what you get. The real is always, by definition, so much more than meets the eye, and they proffer an alternative method for understanding such a world, for mining its truths. Theirs is a method that nervously, even traumatically, models a way of seeing that operates at cross-purposes, I would argue, with some of the very techniques they used—at least in the second half of the 1990s—for reckoning the realness of human bodies, for determining “authentic” black (Jewish) identity, and for making sense of assumed racial differences. Their conspiratorial ways of seeing (stories about witches, warlocks, and worldwide cover-ups) are just a more extreme version of the general racial and cultural paranoia that threads itself through much of African American public discourse and highlights the profound inadequacies of sight—a seeing that demands believing and disbelieving at the same time.⁷ This specific group’s hard-and-fast assumptions about black Judaic belonging, assumptions linked unquestioningly to maternal genes and fatherly seeds, belie their more skeptical collective responses to supposed transparencies of the social world.⁸ I want to examine this mixture of social skepticism and certainty, thinking specifically about how authenticities and sincerities erratically coexist—often in volatile equilibrium. The chapter’s opening tale about hide-and-seek police cars and anticop rhetoric exemplifies the contextual fodder that sincere and authentic versions of reality use to make their cases—and to challenge each other’s social claims. “Real Jews” looks at local police officers, conspiracy theories, and vernacular notions of genetic difference to make a case for why the sincerity/authenticity distinction helps to clarify the stakes of contemporary racial reasoning. Authenticity may appear to dominate

here, but, as I show in the next chapter, sincerity can win some small victories of its own.

Toward an Authenticity of Black Jewry 101: A Quick Primer

The Black Hebrew Israelites of Worldwide Truthful Understanding, founded in the mid-twentieth century, share the designation “Black Jews” (even though they eschew that term for “Israelite”) with several other organizations and religious denominations around the country and the world. Each version of Black Judaism exhibits a slightly different history and philosophy—although their cross-fertilizing linkages through time and space are undeniable. Some of the earliest African American identifications with Judaism date back to the beginnings of the nineteenth century, and William Christian founded one of the earliest self-professed Black Jewish congregations in the latter half of that century.⁹ In the early 1900s, people like Prophet Cherry and William Crowdy started what many historians characterize as “Black Jewish” worship services—The Church of God in Philadelphia and The Church of God and Saints in Christ in Lawrence, Kansas, respectively.¹⁰ Appealing to the metaphorical resonances between American slavery and the bondage of biblical Jews, these Black Jewish hubs extended outward to the north and west as congregants and ministers traveled far and wide with their Judaic teachings. Jamaican Rastafarianism is also associated with this diffusionist impulse as a function of its Jewish iconography, most conspicuously its ubiquitous Star of David.¹¹ The Nation of Yahweh in Florida is a Black Jewish group infamous for its links to crime and corruption, whose leader, Yahweh Ben Yahweh, is serving time in a Pennsylvania penitentiary.¹² Another sect, the Law Keepers, is a Torah-based organization that disavows the label Jew, spelling their self-designation with a capital Y: Yisraelites.¹³

Most famously, the Commandment Keepers of Harlem, ethnographically canonized by Howard Brotz in the 1960s, were founded in the early 1900s by Rabbi Arthur Wentworth Matthew, a black man believed to have come out of Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association, which was also the breeding ground, some historians argue, for several important religio-political leaders in mid-twentieth-century black America.¹⁴ James E. Landing, one of the foremost American scholars on Black Judaic history, even goes so far as to argue that the Nation of Islam’s institutionalization of self-help economic strategies is a direct outgrowth of earlier Black Jewish techniques.¹⁵ The Commandment

Keepers seem to follow this tradition, and Matthew's group is usually considered one of the most closely related to Judaism proper, especially since Matthew allowed white Jews to visit his services and often consulted them on Jewish practices and rituals, something the WTUers would not imagine. Matthew mixed Judaism with a mystic Christianity, and this syncretism caught on, translating into new congregations all over the city and even the world.¹⁶

Presently, Commandment Keepers in Brooklyn, Philadelphia, and all across the country are carefully codifying the history of this particular Jewish organization.¹⁷ Part of that project entails making it historically and cosmologically clear just how their own brand of Black Judaism differs from the kind practiced by contemporary WTU Black Hebrews, a group based not more than five blocks from the Commandment Keepers' Harlem synagogue. Making this distinction explicit is important because the WTU Black Hebrew Israelites are decidedly vocal about their hatred for whites—a hatred rooted in racialized readings of Genesis that interpret Rebekah's birthing of twin boys (Esau and Jacob) as the beginning of two mutually exclusive nations (read blacks and whites) destined to be at war with one another until the end of time. Understanding their gloss on pending race-war might begin with a richer contextualization of “Fuck tha Police” anticop rhetoric in contemporary black America.

The Art of Resisting Arrest

The *Village Voice* once characterized the now defunct and disbanded rap group NWA as America's Musical Enemy #1. The FBI hates this group, their cover read. And why not? The lyrics from their 1988 hit record “Fuck tha Police,” the same song Leroy was ostensibly arrested for blasting into the Brooklyn night, put the entire Los Angeles police department on notice for their systematic brutalities against young black men—and all to the staccato accompaniment of heavy drumbeats and courtroom interludes. As critic Nelson George writes, “N.W.A., a/k/a Niggas With Attitude, were to the 80s what the Beach Boys were to the 60s and the Eagles to the 70s—the definitive California band. ‘Fuck the Police’ spoke to the fantasies of [L.A.’s] majority no less than ‘California Girls’ and ‘Life in the Fast Lane.’”¹⁸ In the mid-1990s, they were “the definitive California band” with a clearly national following. “Fuck tha Police” has undoubtedly blared at cops from windows in cities throughout the country, probably the world. And that was even before the Rodney King video and verdict, when the hip-hop tune became

a kind of militant, grassroots theme-song. And who can forget rapper Ice-T's 1992 anticop controversies? His heavy metal band's album, *Body Count*, got him attacked by police associations and governmental officials, specifically for lyrics like "die, die, die! Pig, die"—complete with an intertextual reprisal of NWA's "Fuck tha Police" anthem.¹⁹ Ironically enough, the selling of that record led not to an increase in cop murders or assaults, but to a string of death threats against the top brass at Warner Brothers, Ice-T's record label. Record company executives' lives were seen as less sacred, less important (at least to the thousands of participants in that particular letter-writing campaign) than the lives of the police officers these missives were written to defend.

At the same time, ubiquitous evening news stories described yet another kind of "cop killer": the street name for special bullets with hollowed-out tips, which allow them to pierce police body armor. Journalists emphasized that these bullets had become many criminals' projectiles of choice. Cop Killer bullets did not just go through vests and into bodies. As a hideous bonus, they splintered into a thousand tiny pieces, with fallout from shrapnel inside the body destroying far more organs than the bullet's initial entry, prompting many to cry out, even those leery of police abuses, "What officer deserves that?"

Maybe, some would answer, officers like Michael Dowd, someone made famous by New York City's Mollen Commission after admitting to hundreds of acts of brutality on the job. Dowd, the so-called cocaine cop who pled guilty to drug trafficking and racketeering in 1992, relayed a story of corruption and criminality running rampant among New York City's finest. The Dowding of law enforcement was not the sensationalist exception, he argued, but the everyday rule, a dysfunctional nervousness within the system. But how are everyday Dowds created? And where?

Internal Affairs investigators historically linked such serious corruptions to the "dumping grounds" phenomenon, a common practice of assigning young, rookie officers to the least desirable locations, which meant neighborhoods full of poor black and Latino residents. In these high-crime urban areas, the theory goes, suburban police officers usually could not have cared less about local residents, assuming that higher-ups did not either. If they did, why would they assign mere rookies to patrol them? That may just be part of the reason why, in the Crown Heights I know, an ethnographic Crown Heights of 1994, the term "flaking civilians" (planting drugs on them to make a bust) was a part of the everyday language residents used to characterize local policing. References to police flaking (and probable police flaking) were quotidian. Residents

imagined themselves seeing more police flakes than dandruffed or snowy varieties. And, with only a few degrees of separation from the whiteness of dandruff flakes to the Satanisms of contemporary anthropology (and this chapter goes through the paces of those degrees—from dandruff flakes to Procter & Gamble's Head and Shoulders shampoo to television commercials to magical "Holly Wood" to Franz Boas's witchcraft-based anthropology), even these seemingly innocent dandruff flakes are an important, if ancillary, part of the tale to be told about how identities get determined through various allegiances to authenticity.

Silver Badges, White Ropes

Once, when I was all of eleven or twelve, I was sitting inside my mother's Mazda in the parking lot of a Key Food Supermarket in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn. I used to hate going into those huge grocery stores whenever they were packed with shoppers (as they usually were when we went), my mother making me hold a place for her at the back of one of the long checkout lines while she collected a few items. So on this evening, I pled my case (feigning sickness or something) and won: I stayed in the car, reading comic books and listening to music while she shopped. But I hadn't been alone ten minutes when two casually dressed white men (both in jeans, T-shirts and denim jackets) approached the car, one on each side, and tried the locked doors. The men then knocked on the car's windows, displaying their badges (hung neatly around their necks) and motioning for me to unlock the door. I froze. It was a pre-teen terror that, in retrospect, I often dismiss as ridiculous, irrational, unwarranted. Surely, they must have been undercover, caught my head bobbing inside a parked car in a dark parking lot, and immediately thought of vandalism. However, I never did unlock those doors.

If guns had appeared from behind the backs of those two badge-necklaced men, then surely their gestures to unlock the doors would have carried more weight with my eleven- or twelve-year-old self, no? But instead, I froze, could not respond, just as I had in my godmother's living-room church. And eventually, the two denim-clad guys simply turned around, vanished, faded back into the world, into the night, into the darkness from which they had so mysteriously emerged. To this day, I imagine that they were criminals with fake badges trying to take advantage of some unsuspecting soul. But maybe they were worse: real cops, Dowd cops, poised to abuse their state-sanctioned power.

Desmond Robinson was a black cop, an undercover black cop who

was shot in 1994 for being too black and too convincing for his own good, someone able to go so deep undercover that a fellow police officer shot him five times on a subway platform after mistaking him for a criminal assailant. His bald-headed, bearded, and ear-ringed brown face was deemed so unlike that of an average police officer that he was said simply to blend into the fluid mass of commuters that swarm New York City's subway system daily. Officers who knew Robinson, and admired his careful crafting of an undercover persona, called him "The Phantom." He disappeared into crowds like a ghost, and this was the very skill that got him killed.

"They said he didn't look like a cop," says Clarence, Stokes's thirty-something son, as we walk into his apartment building. "Didn't look like a cop?! He sure didn't, but that was before he took off his uniform. He didn't look like a cop when he was born. He came out his momma's womb, and the doctor must've been like 'Damn, you don't look nothin' like a cop.' Got no business in that shit. Like fighting a war for these fuckers. Hell no!"

"What do cops look like?" I ask him, pressing the buzzer down in the halogen-lit lobby entranceway.

"Shit, not like us!"

The stories that make their way from person to person in Crown Heights about crooked police officers are often incredibly disturbing—scary examples of "cops gone bad," of bureaucratic corruption running wild, of us "all going to hell in a handbasket." Many of these harrowing police stories are offered up during card games in front of sweaty apartment buildings on hot summer nights. They are passed around at dinner tables, miniature versions of a Malinowskian-described kula ring, where I pass mom the tale of the cop who beat up Charles ("Yeah mom, Charles, the one you are always calling 'the pretty Indian-looking boy'!") for no reason at all, and she tells Aunt Rita (who's not really my aunt) about her friend's stepfather being framed by police in Manhattan twenty years ago for some crime he couldn't have committed because he had only stepped off the boat six minutes before.

And the tales passed on get bigger and bigger. More and more horrifying. A kind of storytelling potlatch always resupplied with newer and fresher tales to burn one's ears with. Long before the police shot an innocent Amadou Diallo and arrested a crooked Michael Dowd, before Phantom Robinson's mistaken identity, before Aunt Rita's friend's stepfather and the cops who arrested Leroy for playing a rap song, other officers from the Seventy-third precinct, within a siren's earshot of my

mom's second-floor window, were convicted for conducting dozens upon dozens of illegal shakedowns, extorting drugs and money from neighborhood drug dealers. One cop even threatened to feed a drug dealer to pit bulls unless the dealer turned over hidden crack and cash for the officer's own private stash. Nefarious police exploits didn't need Judge Milton Mollen's commission to get police corruption onto the lips of Crown Heights residents. The Rodney King fiasco was just icing, not the cake itself. Former NYPD commissioner Raymond Kelly evoking Durkheimian notions of anomie at local press conferences (to describe a small, "rogue" section of the police force) was not necessary, either. Nor was the media's oversaturated coverage of other shakedown rings in the city, other beatings, other police abuses. Indeed, many folks in Crown Heights just assume that officers are corrupt. That is the norm. Even without all the hoopla and media attention, an entrenched skepticism provides fecund ground for, say, Johnnie Cochran's police-conspiracy defense. That may not always have been the case, and may not be in more middle-class neighborhoods, black or white, but in this small, working-class section of Brooklyn, it is. Even the good cop, some residents say, is ultimately just a mild variant of the crooked officer. There is no fundamental disconnectedness between the two.

"A good cop ain't but a little less bad than de bad one," Stokes says to me over another card game on another hot night in Crown Heights. "Don't be fooled. A good cop de rock, and a bad cop is de fuckin' hard place, as God's my witness." German theorist Walter Benjamin talks about how easily and readily government violence becomes a complicatedly self-perpetuating and self-justifying force.²⁰ For Benjamin, the police are exactly like poet Haki Madhubuti's "ghost dust" cops, periodically vanishing into and out of the thick white fog of night, repeatedly condensing to perform heinous acts (like killing Black Panthers Fred Hampton and Mark Clark while they sleep) only to disperse once again back into the white night from whence they came. Even the shiny, silver-colored badge is hidden in the fog, merges with the white opaqueness and ambiguity of the dark and foggy night.

Is the badge no longer sacred in Crown Heights? Was it ever? Are those who don it simply being possessed by some kind of police Pentecostalism? Should the badge be sacred? Must it be so for the good cops to do their jobs? To profane the badge, to have it thought of as less than sacred, to be de-badged—is that simply an exposing and unmasking of fraud? Is the police officer always already imagined as phony, fake, a charlatan, a Leo Felton waiting to be outted by an ever-persistent, watchdog public?

“You were put here to protect us,” raps KRS-One, at a crowded hip-hop club on the elusive Crown Heights/Flatbush border, “but who protects us from you.”

COINTELPROs and Cons

One bitterly cold Sunday afternoon in November, I organize a focus-group meeting with several of the young people I know in the neighborhood, providing space for them to talk about police brutality and other issues. I am really being the anthropologist now, I think to myself, or at least a sociologist, collecting data on people’s subjective realities. The entire meeting will be taped, and I have a few laser-printed pages of what I believe to be carefully crafted, open-ended research questions—to be delivered with my best interviewer poker face.

Damon, twenty-two, a part-time construction worker and one of my most talkative informants, was not there. He was supposed to be, but he did not show. Shanita, the high school gospel singer, didn’t make it either. Two others, Thomas and Carl, both students at Brooklyn College, did, along with a couple of their friends, Ray and Tic, guys I had never met before, one a janitor at an office building in downtown Brooklyn; the other, looking for work. The focus group met in my mom’s one-bedroom apartment. As we talked, the tape recorder whirled and whizzed, but with an NBA basketball game muted on the living room’s TV screen (per Tic’s request), it picked up as much hooting and hollering as anything else. After the game, we decided to call it quits. The guys were tired from a long day.

“Yo, have you ever heard of COINTELPRO?” Thomas asks me, heading for the front door. “You need to check that shit out. You interested in the police and the government and shit, you gotta be checkin’ that bad-boy out.”

“I do have the book,” I reply, walking over to my junky bookcase. “At least I think I do. I ain’t read this shit, yet, though. Give me an overview!”

“It is, like, blowing shit up like the World Trade Center, on shit like the ways that the black leaders and groups and shit were fuckin’ totally infiltrated and shit. Like how folks was like being framed by the government and the government be knowin’ that shit but won’t do anything about it. Deep shit!!”²¹

“Make a motherfucker go crazy,” Carl stretches and yawns as he weighs in. “A niggah read that shit and start tweakin’ out. Wanna Colin Ferguson motherfuckers and shit.”²²

"What ya'll think about that shit?" I ask, milking the last few minutes for all the ethnographic relevance I could get. "I mean, about that whole Colin Ferguson thing, yo?"

"Damn, that was a while back, hunh?" Thomas muses. "Shit, time be flyin'. That was like a year ago."

"More than a year, I think, but what do you think about it?" Anthroman persists.

"What do you think?" Charles asks, craftily employing the old informant-switcheroo tactic.

"I don't know," I respond. "Blood musta had some serious problems, kid."

"Nah, that niggah was just handlin' his business," Ray assures me. "Fuck around and lay me off, and I'll be a subway shootin' mother-fucker, too."

Charles laughs. Anthroman, on the other hand, is haunted by thoughts of Franz Kafka, of his soon-to-be-decapitated Joseph K, of the differences and similarities between him and Colin F: that Colin may have known something that Joseph did not (or vice versa)—to escape the power of the law, if only for a second, is to transgress it. In the end, you still lose, but you go out with a big bang and not just the faintest whimper. In this scenario, resistance is futile, and everything is pre-ordained, a setup. But the more futile the situation, the harder they come. And the WTU Black Hebrews are not nearly the only ones who successfully exemplify this fact. When the focus-group guys finally leave my place, I finish watching the basketball post-game show, scribble a to-do list for myself, and then help my mother clear off the dinner table.

Black Maskulinity

If de-badging can be considered akin to unmasking in any way, what does the Colin Ferguson Long Island Railroad massacre unmask? What about the Desmond Robinson shooting? Not to mention the Rodney King extended beat-down? What does all this unmask about the police and their relationship to the policed? And whose masks are fooling whom?

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh, the clay is vile

Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
 But let the world dream otherwise,
 We wear the mask.²³

This excerpt from Paul Laurence Dunbar's most famous poem, "We Wear the Mask," distills and articulates his understanding of just what it means for African Americans to hide their feelings, their emotional and psychic identities, from a purportedly hostile and antiblack world. Dunbar's "We" stands as a proxy for black America—black Americans shielding their/our true selves from the rest of the nation-state. "We" smile and shuck and jive and laugh, he laments, even and especially when we are least happy. In fact, for Dunbar, happiness becomes a kind of racialized impossibility. The masks "We" wear may fool the rest of the country, but they cannot fool us. The wearers still feel the pain and misery of their duplicitous, costume-balled lives.

What might it mean, in this context, to unmask? Attorney William Kunstler appropriated the phrase "black rage" to describe Colin Ferguson's horrific act.²⁴ But if it is a race-based rage, is every black person, as a function of their unexpressed anger, prone to such pure and extreme rages in the dark recesses of their (our) "tortured souls"? Do we still, like Frederick Douglass, see an infamous slavemaster, that "snake," Massa Covey, behind every tree and stump and fire hydrant in view, hidden "like a thief in the night"? How much is masking ourselves, Dunbar's characterization notwithstanding, actually about fooling *ourselves*—first and foremost—not just other people? And does such self-delusion complicate claims to intentionality and willfulness? What if the image of the mask can sometimes, if even only fleetingly, fool the wearer, too? Can we look in the mirror and forget "we" sport a disguise, taking that hard and flat-footed reflection as the sure totality of our very being, a self with clear and unalienated features? What would happen if "we" took off those masks? If we no longer let them fool us? Would exposing the truth about oneself (by ripping off one's racial masks) mean gunning down innocent people on the Long Island Railroad and proclaiming, in a courtroom full of incredulous eyewitnesses, that someone else really did it—the legal tactic borrowed a decade later by Washington, D.C.'s serial shooter, John Allen Muhammad? How does one even do that—that is, take off masks so prosthetically and hermetically glued to a sense of selfhood?

Maybe rumors unmask!? Conspiracies? Like the one Damon told me (a fact, he says, not a rumor) about Snapple beverages being owned by

the Ku Klux Klan? Or the other one I heard from my cousin Isaiah about a Procter & Gamble spokesperson appearing on a television talk show to tell the world that proceeds from their products go to Satanic cults—and that it doesn't really matter what people think about that newly revealed fact because their products are everywhere, all over the world, indispensable, and so Christians can't do anything about it anyway? Did you hear the one about Reebok sneakers being made by a South African company to support the Apartheid effort with African American dollars, a rumor so pervasive that Reebok had to launch a national advertisement campaign to dispel it? Didn't they? Or how about Camel cigarettes? Or was it Marlboro? Church's chicken?²⁵ Are rumors more powerful than facts? Are they more true than "the truth"? As counterintuitive as it sounds, might rumors provide some of the fastest routes into the inner structure of the real?

"I wouldn't fuck with Tropical Fantasy," Richard, twenty-two, who lives across the hall from me, advises as I go with him to the corner store and pick out one of the bright, multicolored bottles of fruit punch from the deli's refrigerator.

"Why not?"

"I heard that they be putting shit in there to sterilize us. Sterilize black men."

"Where you hear that shit?"

"Fucking all around. You know it's probably true. They only sell that shit in black neighborhoods. Like malt liquor and shit. If motherfuckers wanted to wipe us the fuck out, which you know they do, they know to hit us with the fried chicken and the fuckin' alcohol."

"White folk drink alcohol and shit," I reply, still holding the bottle of Tropical Fantasy in my outstretched hand—but keeping the freezer door ajar with my foot as I await his response.

"Yeah, but I bet they ain't drinkin' shit like this." He points to bottles of Old English and Red Bull malt liquors, both served up in forty-ounce portions. "And you damn well know they ain't got no Tropical Fantasy in they shit, either. Pepsi. Coke. That is the shit that they drink. And I ain't gonna be the niggah caught out there when the eleven o'clock news starts talking about some scandal at Tropical Fantasy and shit. By then it would be too late for you Muggs. Shit, and if that stuff ain't fucked with by whitey, it won't be by me. Sprite, Coke, and the regular shit tastes better than all them cheap shits anyways."

Not quite convinced, but wanting to be more safe than sorry, especially if Richard's late-breaking newscast comes true, I put the Tropi-

cal Fantasy back for a small Poland Spring bottled water. "I'm glad you ain't pick up that Evian," Richard adds as he drops some change on the countertop for a box of Philly blunts and some plantain chips. "You know what KRS-One said about that shit, 'it is *naive* spelled backwards.' You better recognize."

Evian sure is naive spelled backward, I think to myself. And, oddly enough, doesn't the Boston tea-party iconography on Snapple bottles look a little like slave ships landing on America's colonial shores? And what's to say that the *K* by the picture doesn't stand for, as the theory goes, Ku Klux Klan? I study my Poland Spring bottle even more carefully before finally deciding to buy it.

Rumors speak the unspeakable, of sterilization and Klan-based economics, of naive consumers and Satanist manufacturers. They talk about the world in ways that are unsettling, mostly because of what they claim to reveal, to unmask. And they have a wonderfully proficient way of co-opting more official truths to their cause. For surely, as many Brooklynites have told me time and again, the Tuskegee Experiments (where black men with syphilis were allowed, by World Health Organization Doctors, to die untreated in the name of science) were, in fact, real deaths.²⁶ And isn't there documented proof, Shanita asks me, real proof, that the first settlers gave blankets laced with small pox as peace offerings to the Native Americans? Didn't she hear that somewhere? Or read it in history class? If so, why would the idea of AIDS as a man-made, government-engineered, black-people-killing disease seem absurd—especially when AIDS rates in Africa are so astronomically high?

"Like Africans spend every day sitting around in their huts exchanging blood," Richard frowns, shaking his head in disbelief. "They trying to get rid of them folks," he declares matter-of-factly. "Us folks." And rumors use all of that stuff, sift through it, turn over the facts, and come out clearer, truer, stronger. They are the ultimate myths we tell ourselves about why someone else might want to kill us—and how they might try. In Crown Heights, at least the Crown Heights I knew in 1994, conspiracy theories helped to rewrite the contours of local community, national polity, and international concerns.

"When we steal, we take tangible shit," Damon says to me as we walk over to McDonald's for a quick dinner on me. "A TV, a stereo, and shit. Objects and shit. When white folks steal, they steal souls and shit, they steal cultures. We kill people, they kill peoples. That's the difference. Look at all that shit they done did to us, and tell me they ain't evil."

Soulthievery

The soultheft Damon was talking about manifests itself in many ways. Not just Tropical Fantasy sodas and Reebok sneakers. Not just KKK-owned Snapple products and water-bottled sterilization. But the rumors are a good entry-point into this world of stolen black bodies, souls, and peoples, a world bubbling over and above that familiar one of more discrete and tangible things. Surely, there are treacherous ways into this world—extreme roads, rough tracks—like the path that leads from Derrick’s apartment in a three-story brownstone to the Brooklyn Public Library.

“The Ankh is the important symbol.” Derrick, nineteen and recently graduated from high school, carefully weighs his words as he stage-whispers to me from across the narrow library table. “It is the key, and the key is the knowledge. The key is the knowledge. The most obvious and straightforward proof we have of Christianity’s patriarchal, Western, and devilish ways. Take the ankh and look at it. You have to really look to see the truth.”²⁷ I stare at his drawing of the ankh and cross as he continues speaking from across the table.

“I’m about to teach you symbology,” he continues, “you ain’t gonna get this over there at Columbia. The ankh is male and female, man and woman. Do you see it? Penis and vagina, a coming together, a community, a family. That is what the ancient Egyptians realized, how they gained their power. Now go from there to the cross, and you will see Western, white supremacy’s patriarchal axing-out of the female. She is gone. Cut out. The ankh is cut along the female half, so you only have the male portion left. What was once a heavenly unity and sexual togetherness is now a warped picture of some male God birthing a man without a woman, kid. You see that sick, unnatural shit, son? That homosexual fantasy? See, whitey got it in for his bitches, too.”²⁸

Derrick demonizes a form of “patriarchal” power to validate an equally sinister sexism. Black Egyptians treated men and women equally, he says, but white supremacy marginalizes femininity, rejecting its symbolic power. With the non-sequitur invocation of homosexuality, this becomes another kind of Settepani moment. Sexual orientation is linked to whiteness and dismissed as part of a larger, antifemale conspiracy—and Derrick was making his case long before Dan Brown’s controversial thriller.²⁹ This becomes another kind of soultheft, an anti-feminist feminism, something that mirrors the larger stealing of “peoples” that is imagined to have long-term consequences for racial soulfulness and collective vitality.

Soultheft? How does one get away with that? And why do conspiracies help us find our answers? Because the truth is too lame? Too obvious? Do we have a hardwired need for explanations that are more complex? Derrick and I leave the library to get a bite to eat at a McDonald's on Utica Avenue, and he makes our culinary context an explicit theme of analysis.

"We have to eat either this nasty-ass McDeath," Derrick says, "or in these Chinese places and shit with two-inch thick bulletproof glass, like we are animals in a cage, 'cause they are afraid what we gonna do once we get sparks of the real truth of how they killin' us." Anthroman decides to play devil's advocate, saying stuff like, "What the fuck would we do, man?" and "Shit, if we ain't got the truth yet, when we gonna get it?" And Derrick mostly ignores me or counters with even darker truths—about the hidden secrets of the U.S. monuments, about the symbolic importance of obelisks as geometric form, about Washington, D.C., being designed and laid-out on the basis of an ancient Egyptian model, and about the powerful secret societies that really run our country. And Anthroman is jotting details down all the while:

Notes on Derrick's Theory—

1. The Washington Monument (symbol of American what?), tallest structure in the Washington, D.C., area; no other building allowed to obstruct view.
2. Structured after African obelisk, symbolic of the regenerative powers of Godhead?
3. The design of Lincoln Memorial, patterned after a temple in honor of Ramses II (or III), pharaoh of nineteenth dynasty (?), Egypt.
4. Meridian Hill Park in D.C. made to align the city with the same pathway of sun passing through Ancient Egypt. What does it even mean to align sun-pathways? Go back to Howard dorm and verify?
5. Stealing cultures means stealing people's symbols.

Derrick gives me some book titles and challenges me to do my own research, to uncover "for myself" the ways in which the United States is very cryptically but obviously connected to ancient Egyptian Freemasonry. He shares a horizon of rationality with any social scientist, the careful cobbling together of purported historical facts.³⁰

"But people don't really believe that stuff, do they?" one of my graduate-school colleagues at Columbia asks over some Ethiopian food

at Massawa's in Upper Manhattan. "They don't believe that that is true, do they? They can't!" About as much as "they" believe the smallpox blankets, I reply. Or the Tuskegee experiments. Or the Atlantic slave-trade for that matter. Are the "paranoid" feared because they have an ultrafinalized view of the world that is not open to discussion or change? There is some kind of soulstealing going on in this land of wailing sirens, outlawed Holy Spirits, and the red/blue/red/blue ambivalences of flashing police lights, but where do we reasonably draw our epistemological lines in the sand?

Undoubtedly, there is power in conspiratorial finality. It is what the hard scientists look for: the chemistrial-conspiracy that makes all reactions and equations clear, providing absolute certainty. It is what anthropologists long for: that metanarrative, master narrative, which explains all of mankind in a few sparse lines. They all want conspiracy. They want the power of paranoia. Conspiracy theories are simply structural functionalism on acid.³¹ Structural functionalists would love for their analyses to read the way "Who shot JFK?" does, where everything fits snugly in its place and no rock is left unturned, no hand unsoiled. Everything has a function, a reason for being: in this case, to promote the status quo by dissembling and duping the masses into thinking that things ever change. For conspiracy theorists like Derrick, we are still in ancient Egypt, whether we know it or not. Edward William Lane's *Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* could really be about us right now.³² Current Afrocentric preoccupations with ancient Egyptian antiquity can be read as current events.³³ We are always reliving the same unfinished battles between Napoleon and the Egyptians, between goodness and evil, with evil reproducing itself, reproducing its coherent systematicity through lies and secret symbols. This is a kind of ultrasincerity that gives agency not only to people but to everything else. It is global animism, where things are given interiorities and the most dastardly intentions, things like nation-states, multinational corporations, fruit punch, anything. There is no passive-verb theorizing. Everything is about locating effective agents, even and especially where one might least expect to find them.

When forty-ounce bottles of Old English Malt Liquor are poured, passed, and swallowed for the people not present (because snuffed out by the very real surreality of inner-city violence), conspiracy is more than a belief, more than a perspective. It becomes incontestable, assumed, a given. All else is added or taken away, but the disproportionality of death-rates remains beyond modification. The particularities and justifications are almost immaterial and unimportant—wholly un-

necessary.³⁴ That Snapple *could* be owned by the KKK is as real as the death rates of young black men caught up in Harlem's version of Bangladesh.³⁵ And in a frantic and unfulfilling search for answers to horrific questions, the explanations chosen become as harrowing as the questions themselves. And Snapple, Reebok, or some other commodity-cum-traitor is as potentially reasonable a culprit as any other. Conspiracy theory becomes a populist technique that, much like the novelistic form, "organizes reality and knowledge in a such a way as to make them susceptible to systematic verbal reincarnation."³⁶

The hyperreality of conspiracy theories reifies and fetishizes "the real" in ways that potentially unmake it, challenging its abilities to inconspicuously define our everyday social interactions. Mark Liechty's distinction between "reality" and "plausibility" among middle-class residents of contemporary Kathmandu is particularly operative here. Conspiracy theories, like middle-class Nepali readings of Hollywood films, are not simply about imagining or "organizing reality" in a way that privileges realism. Instead, they are about appreciating the powers of plausibility, of the merely possible.³⁷ They are less about what is, than what could be—what simulates the rules for constructing realities most persuasively. Conspiracy theories privilege this distinction between reality and plausibility, reversing their relative importance and fraying their intertextual edges.

Hollywood Spells

I first met Thomas through Derrick. A WTU Black Hebrew Israelite, Thomas is twenty-five and works as a security guard. Guys in the neighborhood don't seem to have any problem with Thomas, "no static," as they say, because everyone knows that "he is all about some serious shit, being a black Hebrew Israelite and all." Thomas reads the Bible daily, interpreting it to describe how the real Jews of God's covenant were displaced and replaced with impostors, those who, according to Revelation, "say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie."³⁸

It is an Early Saturday morning in January. Thomas laughs heartily, approvingly, when he sees me, insisting that my Black Hebrew subconscious is trying as hard as it can to get me to accept my "true Israelite identity." I haven't trimmed my spotty beard for at least two months now, and the WTUers believe, on the basis of their literalist readings of the Old Testament, that African American men, the real Black Israelites, should not trim their facial hair. Thomas tells me that he wants me to read and study with the Israelites, to go to some meetings with him.

He wants to convert me “to the truth you already should know, do know, in the back of your soul.”

“Black folk gotta realize they ain’t Africans,” he says. “We are from the twelve tribes of Israel. All that Egypt, Kemet, Africa shit is bullshit. We ain’t got shit to do with Africa. But don’t worry. I’m gonna show you the light!”

The Black Hebrew Israelites are usually labeled a black supremacist group, but if so, this is black supremacy with a difference. Whereas much black separatism is predicated on a certain embrace of Africanity (in terms of ancient Egyptian antiquity in its Afrocentric guise, or the presentist diasporic leanings of various Pan-Africanisms), these Hebrew Israelites are adamant about blacks in the New World not being African at all—they do not claim Africa as some kind of symbolic, cultural, or genetic ground for contemporary social identity in the Americas. The Black Hebrew Israelite diaspora is configured quite differently from conventional models of black diasporic possibility. Ties to Africa are completely severed.³⁹ There is still a notion of connection across the Americas, but these links have different significances. Each New World nation is associated (through particularized readings of history books, of the 1611 King James Bible, and of the controversial Apocrypha) with a particular Jewish tribe from the Old Testament: black Americans are the tribe of Judah; West Indians are the tribe of Benjamin; Haitians, the tribe of Levi; Dominicans, the tribe of Simeon; Puerto Ricans, the tribe of Ephraim; Guatemalans, Panamanians, Cubans, North American Indians, Seminole Indians, Argentineans, Chilean, and Mexicans are each designated as members of distinct tribes. And the contiguous Latin American countries between Colombia and Uruguay are lumped together as a singular tribal unit, Asher. This is a notion of diaspora (and a labeling of diasporic belonging) that cuts across racial categorizations (at least as they conventionally operate in a U.S. context) and allows for a Black Israelite diaspora that connects Chileans and Colombians with Cubans and African Americans, but disallows any inclusion of continental Africans. Indeed, the Israelites offer a corrective to what they consider Afrocentric excesses and historical misreadings of transatlantic travel. For Black Hebrew Israelites, “Arab Muslims” and African Muslims/Christians/pagans sold the Black Jews into bondage. And they did this, the Black Hebrew Israelites claim, because these “Africans” and “Arabs” knew that the Black Jews in Africa were an entirely different *people*.

“Yo, come here,” Thomas yells, “and check this commercial out.” The lone television in this two-bedroom apartment that Thomas shares

with his friend and housemate, another Black Hebrew Israelite, Bigs, is tuned to a McDonald's commercial set in an apartment building full of black families.

"Yo, you know I been to Hamburger University, right?" I mutter over the television advertisement. "The McDonald's college for Hamburgerology or something like that."

"Where the fuck is that?" Bigs asks. "I think I have a boy who went there."

"Near Chicago," I answer, my eyes still glued to the commercial. Bigs's face signals a feeble acknowledgment.

"This commercial is a trip and a half," Thomas exclaims, nodding his head back and forth to the faint hints of a jingle forming the ad's musical bed.

The scenes depict bags of McDonald's food giving off a white mist that circulates through an apartment building full of black residents, forcing them all to hunger for those "two all beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions on a sesame-seed bun." The characters in the ad don't seem to know exactly why they suddenly crave McDonald's. And they aren't even smelling the food. Its manna-like power is simply hypnotizing them, a white mist spreading through their tenement building like curlicue smoke. All they really know is that they suddenly crave some Mickey D's.⁴⁰ Once the McDonald's spot ends, our discussion veers toward sitcoms, miniseries, and rap music. When the conversation focuses on contemporary cinema, Thomas decides to "school" me on Hollywood.

"It is, historically speaking," he assures me, "the name for the actual wood that witches and warlocks used in the olden days to make magic wands and broom sticks. Holly wood. Straight up."

"How you know that?" I ask.

"Man, we got mad info on these folk. They be tellin' on themselves left and right, and you can get that shit from they own books. Like I told you before, this shit is about wars. About good and evil. About God and the Devil and which side you choose. The founding fathers and shit was all Masons. Every one of them. From Washington on down. You heard of 'the skull and crossbones' shit that Bush was a member of at Yale or Harvard or some shit. That shit is all tied to the same thing. Satanism, man. These motherfuckers are about the Devil, man. They cast spells. That is why Hollywood has the name. It's one big broomstick, yo. They want to let you know without letting you know. You think this shit ain't real; you better do your own research. It is like I done told you. It ain't about converting and shit to a particular religion or being an African.

JACOB vs. ESAU

Who Were JACOB & ESAU? They were descendants of Abraham and Isaac (Gen 25 19-26, 1st Chron 16-16-17) JACOB and ESAU were Twins at birth (unidentical twins) Gen 25.24-26

Who was Jacob? Jacob was the 3rd father of the Promise, meaning he & his seed (children) would be chosen unto the Lord as his people, which is the 12 Tribes of Israel, a nation in Egypt for 430 years (Exod. 1 1-14, Gal 3.17). Jacob was a man of color (brown-skinned from melanin, so-called black man.) contrary to his brother Esau who was described as red & hairy (Gen 25 25, Gen 27:11) *Jacob is the father of the chosen race.*

Who was Esau? Esau is the father of the Greeks and Romans, who are the forefathers of the so-called *White* people, Caucasians or Europeans which they refer to themselves as today "Esau" comes from the ancient Hebrew Word "L-Shaw," which means "wasted away is he," because his Brown color (Melanin) was taken away from him in his mother's womb (Gen 25 25, Num 12-9-12). At his birth, ESAU was described as being "Red (so-called white), all over like an hairy garment" (Gen 25 25) and he became the father of the Edomites (or "Idumeans", which means RED people. See Zondervan Bible Dictionary under "Edom"). The descendants of Esau, called Edomites lived in Mount Seir (Gen 36 1-end). Esau despised and sold his birthright (Gen 25 25-34 & Heb 12:15-17) *even though he was the first-born between himself and his twin brother Jacob* Esau's descendants, so-called whites are a race cursed by God (Isa 34:5, Rom 9:13 [Mal. 1:1-4] Ezek 35:1-end, Ezek 36 5)

Did either of the parents, Isaac or Rebekkah understand that the CREATOR loved Jacob and Hated Esau? *Yes, Rebekkah understood!* READ, Gen 25 19-22 (1st Sam. 9), Gen 25:23-24,

Gen 27 5-33 (especially verse 13) and Gen 25 23-24

Does the CREATOR still have a preference between the two? YES! He still only loves JACOB's CHILDREN, the 12 Tribes (Rom 9 1-5&9-21, Deut 7 7-8, Zech 2 8, Jer 1 5 Rom 11:1-4, Rom. 9:9-21 [Mal 1 1-5], Ezek 25 12-14, Mark 7:24-30 [Greeks / Romans = Edom(ites) / Idumeans], Isa 45 17-19, Amos 3 1-2, Psa 147 19-20, Isa 14 1-8, Ezek 35 1-end, 2 Sam 7:23-24, Isa 46 13, Amos 3 1-2, Acts 5:29-31, Matt 10 5-6, Rev 7 1-4 and Rev 21:10-12)

Why can't the descendants of ESAU (so-called whites) and JACOB (the 12 Tribes) get along with each other as two nations? First of all the Lord made them two (2) different nations (Gen 25 23-25) and all the prophecies concerning our two nations must be fulfilled. Enmity (or hatred) between the children of Esau & the children of Jacob (Gen 3 14-15) (Note: The Serpent=Edom / Red/or so-called white) people - Read, Rev 12:3-9, Job 30:1-8 & The

Woman=Israel (the 12 Tribes) - Read Isa 54 5-10) *The Creator, chose one nation over the other* (Ps 147:19-20, Amos 3:1-2, Deut 7:7-9, Rom 9:11-14, Gen 25 21-25, Num 14 1-3, Jer 51 19) The nation of Edom has broken the brotherly covenant (Obad 10-15&18, Ps 83:1-6, Amos 1:9&11).

Is Edom still **CONDEMNED**? YES, Esau was condemned before he was born! (Gen 25 25, Num. 12 9-12, Rom 9 11-13, Heb. 12 6-8, Prov. 16 4, Isa 34:5, (Apocrypha) 2nd Esdras 6 7-10), Isa 26:10)

Even if they repent they will not obtain mercy from the CREATOR (Heb 12:16-17, Gen. 25:29-end and Isa 26 10)

Why does the CREATOR love JACOB (the Israelites) so much? READ Deut. 7 6-10, Zech 2:8, Deut 32 8-10, Isa 43:21, Isa 44:1-8 & v21-26, Isa. 45:v14-19 & v21-23&25, Ps 148:14, Ps

Genesis 25:23 "And the LORD said unto her (Rebekah), Two NATIONS are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the ELDER shall **SERVE** the YOUNGER."

(Apoc) 2 Esdras 6:7-9: "7-Then answered I and said, What shall be the parting asunder of the times, or when shall be the end of the first, and the beginning of it that followeth? 8-And he said unto me, From Abraham unto Isaac, when Jacob and Esau were born of him, Jacob's hand held first the heel of Esau. 9-For Esau is the end of the world, and Jacob is the beginning of it that followeth."

THE 12 TRIBES OF THE NATION OF ISRAEL - ACCORDING TO THE KING JAMES VERSION OF THE HOLY BIBLE

1. JUDAH.....THE NEGROES
2. BENJAMIN.....WEST INDIANS
3. LEVI.....HAITIANS
4. SIMEON.....DOMINICANS
5. ZEBULON.....GUATEMALA TO PANAMA
6. EPHRAIM.....PUERTO RICANS

7. MANASSEH.....CUBANS
8. GAD.....AMERICAN INDIANS
9. REUBEN.....SEMINOLE INDIANS
10. NAPHTALI.....ARGENTINA AND CHILE
11. ASHER.....COLOMBIA TO URUGUAY
12. ISSACHAR.....MEXICANS

As well as the Scattered (Dispersed) Israelites in all Nations throughout the Four Corners of the Earth. In Places like Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Egypt & Africa, India, the Far East and More...

God has a chosen people, Jacob's seed. And he has people he hates: Esau's offspring, the children of Edom. And he describes who is who in the Bible. And God is gonna destroy these Satan worshippers. But for now they trying to fortify they ranks and shit. To cast their spells on the masses. Keep them stupid and ignorant. Hollywood is straight-up about casting spells, kid.

"Do you notice that every time some shit comes out in the movies, it is only a bit later and it is out in real life. They *create* that shit with movies. Movies are like their spells, son. They be using that shit to get us

JEWS AND THE JEWS, AND ALL THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, WERE COLORED PEOPLE AND ARE COLORED PEOPLE TODAY

THESE TRIBES MAKE UP THE NATION OF (ISRAEL):
 READ: Genesis 35:10 to 12, 22 to 26, 48:5,
 27:29, 49 Ch.

1. JUDAH The Negro
 2. BENJAMIN West Indians
 3. LEVI Haitian
 4. SIMEON Dominican
 5. ISHUBEN Panamanian
 6. EPHRAIM Puerto Rican
 7. MANASSEH Cubans
 8. REUBEN Dominican Idos.
 9. GAD North American Indian
 10. ASHER Brazil
 11. NAPHTHALI Argentina
 12. ISSACAR Mexicans
- READ: Rom. 11:1, Jere. 31:15 to 37, Jere.
 7:20 to 26, 1 Chronicles 9:1, Revelation 7:3
 to 8, 1 Peter 1:9, Exodus 14:5, 6 Deut. 7:6,
 and 14:2, Isa. 40:15.



This white man is not a Jew. Rev. 2:9 and
 Read the Thirteenth Tribe by Koestler, Rev.
 3:9. Jesus did not die for the world, or
 Christianity but for Israelites: Matthew
 1:21, Exodus 4:22, 19:5 and 6, Isa. 40:15,
 Genesis 27:29, St. John 17:9, St. John 3 Ch,
 Matthew 1:21, Matthew 10:5 to 6, Romans 9:1
 to 5, 1 Corinthians 10:20, Matthew 15:22 to
 24, Ezekiel 36:24 to 38, Ephesians 2:8, 9.

Our color is like unto the brown (EARTH) Jer.
 17:2 Gen. 2:7, 1 Cor. 15:47, Amos. 9:7 Act.
 21:38 Lam. 5:10, Job 30:30, Nu. 12:1 to
 13, Songs of Solomon 1:5, Acts 13:1.

The color of Christ is in Rev. 1:14, 15,
 Daniel 7:9, Ezekiel 1:27, Jere. 14:2.

USE KING JAMES VERSION BIBLE ONLY

TO BE SOLD,
 On Thursday the third Day
 of August next,
 A CARGO
 OF
 NINETY-FOUR
 PRIME HEALTHY
NEGROES.
 CONSISTING OF
 Thirty-nine MEN, Fifteen BOYS,
 Twenty-four WOMEN, and
 Sixteen GIRLS.
 JUST ARRIVED,
 In the Brigantine DEMBIA, Fran-
 cis Barr, Master, from SIERRA
 LEON, by
DAVID & JOHN DEAS

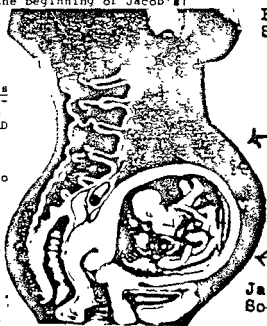
Why did we
 become slaves
 under the so-
 called white
 people? READ
 Deuteronomy
 28 & 32
 chapters,
 15th verse to
 the end.
 Jere. 5:19
 Hosea 4:6.
 You must
 learn the
 true laws of
 the lord;
 Read:
 Deuteronomy,
 Leviticus,
 Numbers, and
 Jere. 16:2,
 3, Isa. 1:13,
 Ephe. 6:10 to
 28 Colossians
 1:12 to 16,
 Hebrews 9:24-
 27, Malachi
 3:6 to 10.

Read about the inevitable destruction of the
 Edomites. READ: Revelation 13:10, Obadiah 1:10,
 18, Isa. 14:1 to 27, Zephaniah 1:15 to 18,
 Habakkuk 2:8 and 12, Eze. 39:10, 28:1 to 10
 and 35:1 to 11, 36:5, 38:22, Job 20:4 to 8, Romans
 9:13, Matthew 24, Isa. 49:22 to 26, 1 Thessalonian
 5:3, 4, Revelation 18 Ch.

The so-called Americas and Palestine, which the Bible calls the lands of Canaan, was given to the
 tribes of Israel by the Lord. The so-called white people known in the Bible as The Devil, stole
 these lands from the Israelites and the other nations; through wickedness, murder, robbery, rape,
 lies, injustice, torture and slavery. But the Lord says He will pay the so-called white people
 double for their injustice. Read: PSA 105:10, 11; Ezekiel 35:5 to 11, and 36:1 to 7; Galatians
 6:7, Obadiah 1:10, Rev. 13:10, Joel 3 Ch. Daniel 8:25 to 27, Malachi 4:1 to 4.

!ORDER: SPEAKING TAPES AND BOOKS!

The so-called white man is the seed
 of ESAU - FATHER of the Edomites.
 Originally They're one (NATION)
 Genesis 25:19 to 34, Genesis 35Ch,
 Malachi 1:1, 2, 3.
 You must reject the mark of this
 beast and his image the crucifix,
 the philosophies of the so-called
 white world: his capitalism,
 politics, military and religion;
 else, that Israelite will be
 destroyed. READ: Gen. 4:1 to 16,
 St. John 8:44, Roman 9th Ch,
 Revelation 13:13 to 17, 1to 8, Ch.
 12. The color of the so-called
 white man is a curse from the Lord,
 Read: Numbers 12:1 to 13, 2 Kings
 5:27, Exodus 4:6, Genesis 4:11 to
 15, Genesis 25:25, Revelation 17
 and 18. The End of Esau's world is
 the beginning of Jacob's!



Esau- Edom or
 So-Called White
 People.

TWINS IN
 HER WOMB

Jacob- Israel or
 So-Called Negroes

The Deliverance and Salvation of
 Israel READ: Isa. 66:15, 16,
 Habakkuk 1:5, 3:3 to 16, Ezek. 1:4,
 16, Daniel 12:1, 2, 3, Matt. 24:30, 31;
 Zech. 5:1-6, 9:12-17,
 2 Thess. 4:16, 17; PSA 91:137, 149:6-
 9, Isa. 60, 40, 14; Ephesians 1 Ch.
 Matt. 19:28.

ready for what they gonna do to us. They want to get us prepared for
 what's coming, for the ways they gonna come out the closet with they
 wicked shit. Man, don't sleep on these motherfuckers, kid. This shit is
 real. They want us to accept anything as okay. You be watching those
 talk shows, you seein' how they are gettin' us ready for all kind of blas-
 phemy against God, all kind of shit they about to bring on. It used to be
 that just being homosexual was wrong. Now that shit is accepted, and

they got ya'll accepting that shit as normal so they doin' more and more crazy shit. Geraldo got shit like lesbian sisters in love, or men who turn into women and shit. 'Cause they want you ready for the perverted world of chaos they are gonna institute; their new world of chaos. That is the new world order they looking for."

Thomas promises to bring me the documentation for his Hollywood stuff. And he stands by its accuracy. He can prove it, he says, back it up, "back it all the way up." Thomas and Bigs insist that they understand what is going on with black folks in America today, and it has to do with a casting of spells on the populace, the way the mass media literally construct reality. The guys claim to have proof. We talk a little more about television shows and motion pictures, about the country's top-grossing movie at the time, *Stargate*. Jaye Davidson, the male actor who played a man who fooled much of America's movie-going audience into thinking he was a woman in *The Crying Game*, is Ra in *Stargate*, the god of ancient Egyptian fame. And the movie makes Ra an alien from outer space with a raspy and course ("devilish," says Thomas) voice and glowing eyes. Not a god, but a space alien. Thomas finds this alteration particularly meaningful.

"They want us to know they got folk comin' from outer space for our asses," he warns with a solemn grin. "And all day, man, all day, with their movies, their television and their music, they are trying to fatten us up for the slaughter."

New World Orders

As part of the fieldwork experience, Anthroman decides to read/study with Thomas, Bigs, and a few of their Israelite friends. We meet at least once a week for a little more than three months. From the middle of February to the beginning of June, we read books that they assign, getting together to talk about them afterward. I want to be the anthropologist, to get into their heads and hearts and souls, to find out not only what they think and feel, but why. After a couple of weeks, I even start to see myself making some headway, getting some data. I begin to know their points by heart, to get their dogma down. And as I try to do my ethnographic job, they are trying some heart and soul excavating of their own. They want to find out what I'm about, if I am one of those "sellout niggas not worth a shit" (a phrasing from Bigs), someone they are going to have to disavow sooner or later, like when "the war is on and we gotta paint a bull's-eye on your skull while Branch Davidians are dropping

bombs from helicopters right over Harlem.”⁴¹ And so we talked; we read; we argued.

A month into the whole thing, I know their entire “new world order” argument inside out. They mention it constantly, the world-manipulating Illuminati, a secret society of Devil-worshipping families (Rockefellers, Carnegies, Rothschilds, etc.) trying tirelessly—and successfully!—to control the entire world. I know that these robber baron zillionaires of America’s yesteryears were all, according to Bigs and Thomas, Freemasons, as were America’s Founding Fathers, each one part of a secret society intent on wrenching the world from the hands of God and “his chosen people,” the Black Hebrew Israelites: black, brown, and tan peoples in the Americas.⁴²

I have heard these guys wax historical about the King James version of the Bible, the only translation “sanctioned by God and around for all these years.” They emphasize the book of Revelation and its invocation of “fake Jews,” people now commonly accepted as Jews, they say, embracing a complex kind of anti-Semitism that explicitly overidentifies with Jewishness while concomitantly denouncing it. They decode symbols, deciphering them with a plea to common sense. If Egypt was in Africa and the Egyptians were black, then the Jews had to be a dark-skinned people—even though, I am reminded, the Egyptians are anything but God’s people. And “blacks in America are not African.”

They want me to understand Black Judaic identity as something passed on by the mother. This is how you know whether someone is really a Black Hebrew Israelite, whether they themselves embrace that truth or not. You consult their genealogical tree—at least the closest branches of it. This is especially important, they stress, for biracial inquirers. If your mother is black, then you are a Black Hebrew. If your father is the black parent, the only black parent from one of the designated Black Hebrew nations in the Americas, then you are not. The difference is hard and fast; the status is rendered unilineally. They cite Ezra, where Shechaniah decides to disavow a non-Jewish wife and offspring, rededicating his life to God’s absolute law. They refer to sections of Leviticus and Deuteronomy in the Old Testament. We read the passages; they explain the backstories of the persons mentioned. They even seem genuinely bummed that this matrilineality disqualifies some potentially interested people, but they also stick by what they’ve been taught—the importance of distinguishing real Jews from impostors—a difference that cannot just be parsed phenotypically.⁴³

This version of unilateral descent is very important and does not lose

that significance simply because other Black Hebrew WTUers have offered me understandings of Black Jewish identity that are clearly predicated on a different genealogical reading—that is, the identity is passed not through the mother, but through *the seed*, the father, a function of reading identity patrilineally. Even Bigs sometimes seems to imply that a black father is enough for inclusion—using the Bible’s frequent grocery-listing of males begetting males as a part of that paternal justification. In either case, the Bible is imagined as final arbiter, and it is used to read identity through the externally verifiable lens of ancestry: womb of the mother; begotten by the father. Many people might call themselves Black Jews, but if they don’t fit the proper unilineal formulation, they are summarily disqualified. This is an authentic model for reckoning community and gauging the realness of social identity. We can shake one another’s family trees and authenticate/disqualify other people as a function of what falls out: a white mother, a black father. For the Black Hebrews, this serves as a kind of foundational belief, one that all of their other arguments and considerations rest upon.

It will be another ten years before I realize the importance of this fact, especially of subsequent Black Hebrew attempts to disavow this entire argument, but in 1994, I am less interested in the seed/womb debate and more fascinated by their readings of the dollar bill: how money is implicated in every facet of their theories, how everything neatly fits together; nothing innocuous, nothing left to chance. “Coincidence is the Devil’s lies,” they tell me again and again. I commit their dollar bill details to memory: Why, Bigs asks, if the first pilgrims came from Europe, wouldn’t they put symbols on their money from the places that they knew in Europe, “all those big monuments and landmarks and buildings and clocks they so proud of?” Did they use that? No. It is a pyramid and the eye of Horus instead: Egyptian symbols of Freemasonry. The Illuminati and the Trilateral Commission know the symbolism on the dollar, they argue, but that demonic coterie tries to keep it from the masses, to keep it all hidden in plain view. Especially the truth behind the important number thirteen—a truth as seemingly profound as Minister Louis Farrakhan’s Million Man March speech organized around the symbolic significance of the number nineteen, a nineteen that represents womb and secrecy. Thirteen, nineteen. Nineteen, thirteen. This thirteen is the number of early American colonies and of brick-levels on the pyramid in the dollar bill’s left circle, and of arrows in the American eagle’s clutches, and of stars above its head. The eagle is also significant; it is the only animal, they reiterate, that can stare straight into the

blazing sun, which they chalk up to more Egyptian mythology, more sun-worshipping devilry. The sun is just a ball of fire, they tell me. Just like hell itself. If you worship the sun, they stress, you are worshipping hell. They make their case matter-of-factly. It is all so much more common sense.

And I hound them with questions, usually based on some of the very little I already half-know about Black Judaism: the Falashas are over in Ethiopia, right? Arthur Wentworth Matthew and those Commandment Keepers don't have anything to do with you all, do they? It's Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and then Jacob, right? And what is the history of the Apocrypha anyway? I even ask for clarification on the Sammy Davis Jr. question—just to be sure. The guys listen respectfully, correcting some of my many mistaken assertions (“Nah, we ain't got nothing whatsoever to do with Reverend Ike”). And as they do, every single thing in their world quickly dissolves into its proper place, reveals its hidden purpose. It is all internally consistent. And what is the end result of all this global dissolution? All this plausibility? It is none other than the highly touted “new world order,” *novus ordo seclorum*, also written on the dollar bill. But that is really just another name for an “old hellish chaos,” Bigs says. “All of what the Devil says means its opposite. You translate with the opposite.”

Bigs keeps going back to A. Ralph Epperson's book *The New World Order*, one of his favorites (and mine too, especially with chapter headings like “Marx, Satanist”).⁴⁴ His copy has many passages highlighted, words circled, pages dog-eared and worn from rereading. The book's back cover expresses Epperson's fear that his exposing of “the truth” may get him killed by the Satanist powers that be. (And many of the authors we read during those three months begin or end their manuscripts with similar invocations.) However, other than that huge apprehension, Epperson's tales of devilish conspiracies are written with calmness, coolness, an informal and casual style that belies his more paranoid musings. He affects the distant and sanitized language of a seasoned historian. He talks in sure and confident tones about these vengeful Satanists, linking most of the entire world's history to their hidden machinations: the rise of Russian Communism, the motivations of Adolph Hitler, President George Bush going to the Great Pyramid in Egypt in 1999 “to bring in the millennium reign of Lucifer.” Inside the body of the theory, all of the elements fit tightly. They only make sense in relation to one another: Bush is ushering in Satanic rule because of his ties to Masonry, his popularizing of the phrase “new world order,” his speeches about “a thou-

sand points of light,” a reference to the reign of Lord Maitreya. Like all conspiracy theories, it is conspicuous for its internal consistency—again, a would-be structural functionalism, global theory without a passive voice. In this theory, however, Satanism is the driving force: this is not a Durkheimian social solidarity, but a Satanic one.

“Remember, the founding fathers were Masons,” Thomas reminds me again, “Children of the sun, and they worshipped the Devil. Most Masons don’t know, but that is the truth.”

For the guys in my WTU reading group, everything fits. “Nothing is innocent.” The Satanic state has us all duped. Yes, a Satanic state, not a welfare state. Big Brother is really Beelzebub. And the truth is all right there in the monuments and on the dollar bill. Plain as day in the money we spend. All around us. The Satanic state is everywhere. It is the master in every tree. Present even when absent. Behind every door, in every object. One day it will pounce on us all: “Come, come! Dash on, dash on!” The Satanic state doing its bewitching thing right under our very noses—casting spells, using magic. The real magic of this state, then, is a literalized, spellbinding, and mind-altering witchcraft that, if anything, has the ability to conceal not its lack of realness, but its super-reality.⁴⁵ A state like a motherfucker. “Look at the dollar bill closely,” Bigs reviews. “Money is the root of all evil, but not because of what we think.” It isn’t consumption and capitalism that are to blame, but conspicuous conjuring.

“And the secret society stuff is all over it,” Bigs assures me. “Nothing is innocent.” The Egyptians, the Freemasons, the Satanists are all there. Rumors and conspiracies and truths and lies all commingling for an instant in preparation for the next inevitable fission. Like the truth and lies and truth and lies in the police car’s flashing blue/red lights. The hide-and-seek of the serpent state! A different kind of “snake” in the grass. Its thereness coupled with an equally powerful not-thereness, another “something else” entirely.⁴⁶ And I am listening to these guys talk and asking questions. Trying to unpack their stories, to punch holes in their analyses. And they love that. They eat it up. Debate is their forte. “Come on, Ivy Leaguer,” they say. “Bring it on!”

“You up in Columbia, so you got access to crazy literature and shit,” Tim, another Black Hebrew Israelite, proclaims. “You gotta have access to shit to blow up the spot on the Illuminati, on the Trilateral Commission, on all that shit. You just don’t know what to look for, son. Let me up in that library. I’ll find them folks telling on themselves. Just let me up in there. I’ll blow them whole shit out the water like you wouldn’t believe.”

Drexler and Shamanism

“Brrriinnnnng. Brrriinnngg.” The phone rings. I have to finish reading Kafka for class tomorrow, so I want to ignore it. Brrriinnnnng!!!! I pick up. It’s Bigs.

“Yo, Johnny J. What’s up, man?”

“Nothing, reading and shit.”

“Yo, I got some shit to tell yo ass. You are gonna trip out, kid. Crazy shit.”

“Like what?” I bookmark Kafka, pull out my fieldnotes, and open to a clean sheet.

“Yo, T brought home a tape about the Illuminati that I never heard before. By some ex-witch turned Christian or something. And this white blood was droppin’ science on that shit.⁴⁷ Telling on folk. He was talking about when he was young. About how he was brought up as a witch and thought everyone was, too. And then he learned that wasn’t true. He was from one of them old family of witches who came here with, like, the pilgrims, kid. And like check this out. He dropped a bomb, kid. You know the Salem witch hunts; you know what those really were about?”

“What?” I ask.

“Guess!”

“*Not* witch hunts?”

“Christian hunts! They were witches burning Christians and shit. And like he was taught that. And that the history was changed and shit. Blood was blowin’ shit up about shit like actual spells he was taught to do for shit. And then he dropped the nuclear. He got busted for killing somebody, right? He got into a fight and shot some person or some shit, right? When he got to jail, this guy called his father, a major witch, a granddaddy witch, before his court date, right? He asked his daddy witch to say a prayer and cast a spell so that the jury would be lenient. And he says that he only realized how powerful they were when a senator or some shit came by the next day and let him out of jail and gave him cash, son. And told him to go on and do his thing. That was it. And this is gonna trip you out. Guess where he said that he studied most of his witchcraft shit! And from one of the highest warlocks, he said, in the whole fucking thing.”

“Where?”

“Guess.”

“I don’t know, Egypt?”

“Columbia!” He exclaims jubilantly. “Columbia University. Ain’t

that some shit? The dude that taught his ass was named Arthur Drexler, and guess what the motherfucker taught?”

“Anthropology?” Anthroman responds, finally realizing where Bigs is going.

“Ain’t that a trip, man. I told you you sittin’ on a gold mine up in that bitch. The guy said that Arthur Drexler taught there and was in charge of the department of anthropology but that all the records were changed to cover it up, the history.”

I write feverishly: Drexler: devil? Look up in clio. Witches and Legal Justice System. Chair of Anthropology. Get years. Get dates. Warn folks (hah, hah!).

“Anthropology?” I repeat, skeptically. “What years was he here?”

“I don’t have the tape on me, but I’ll find out. I’ll let you see it, too. You’ll bug out. But you are sittin’ on some crazy shit, man. Look at that history. Damn! Yo, and like now, what kind of stuff are they teaching you there, kid?”

“I don’t know, all kinds of shit, son. It’s really about whatever you want to focus on, you know. So I choose my own courses. Sometimes in other departments and shit.”

“But is anybody there, like, studying some weird stuff. Like the occult or witchcraft or something?”

“Not really. I mean people are talking about everything. But nothing that would seem like that.”

“What kind of books they write?”

“Like on different things. I mean it really is all over the place. Like one professor does stuff on rituals in North Africa, another is like the only one really even remotely like writing about magic—violence and shamanism and stuff.”

“Yo, T,” Bigs calls out to Thomas, who must be off in another room. “You heard of . . . say that again.”

“Shamanism,” I say again.

“Spell it,” Bigs requests.

“S-h-a-m-a-n-i-s-m.”

“Sha-man-ism,” he pronounces, “you heard of that shit, T?”

“Yeah, it is something like those witch doctors and shit,” Thomas answers from a distance.

“Oh shit,” Bigs returns to me. “You gotta be on the ball with that, J. Yo, I’m about to break. But don’t blow up the spot about that shit. Just chill and shit. You are right there with that shit. You gotta let me know what’s up. Let me read some of their shit. I know they tellin’ on themselves. Keep your eyes open, alright?”

We hang up, and I pick up Kafka. I want to do more reading, but can't concentrate. I have full phrases written out from the phone conversation, so I create a transcript from memory for my ethnographic records. Tomorrow, I'll get that tape from Bigs and find out the dates of this Drexler's supposed stint. I turn off the light and try to fall asleep. The faster I go to sleep the sooner I can head out for the library in the morning. But my body is charged; I can't fall asleep. It's only 10:30 p.m., and the university's libraries don't close until midnight. I'm not in Brooklyn anymore, I think to myself. It was a big deal for me, two months earlier, when I finally decided to move closer to campus, three short blocks from the school's library—and for situations just like this. In a flash, my front door slams behind me, and I am sprinting down Amsterdam Avenue.

I look up Arthur Drexler on CLIO (Columbia's computerized library catalog) and find several books on architecture. I retrieve them from the stacks and check them out at the circulation desk, but not before skimming through them quickly, looking at the designs and photographs inside. I search for clues the way Thomas or Bigs might: How many floors in that building? And what is the shape of this other one? I want to have some information ready to go when I get to Brooklyn, when Thomas and Bigs examine the texts. I'll have to sleep on it; think about things. It's 11:55 p.m. by the time I retrieve my material from the stacks, and I struggle to keep them from falling as I scurry through the library doors and out into the darkness of the night.

Walking home with this Drexler information, an uneasy creepiness washes over me. I'm spooked. Scared. Just like that night with the badge-dangling police officers knocking on my mom's parked Mazda. I didn't realize it until right then, until just that second, walking through the pouring rain from Columbia's library, umbrellaless, hatless, with books of possibly Satanic architecture precariously stuffed under my armpits. Getting wet, I want to run home. Not to get out of the rain. The water was fine—tangible, physical, material. I want to get out of the meta-physicalities of the night. All this talk of spellcasting witches and Satanic subliminality has the Seventh-Day Adventist boy in me freaked. But no, not like in my mom's car with the badge-around-the-neck cop-alikes. Not like sitting in one of my graduate courses at Columbia—classes where I sometimes trembled at the thought of uttering a single word. Not even scared like I feel, almost a decade later, writing the chapters for this book—that they are nowhere, all over the place, nonanthropological. More than any of those things, walking through the rain that night, I am scared of my own rational uncertainties. I look all around

me, asking Anthroman to protect my vulnerable soul. Invisible Satanic eyes might surely be plotting.

As a child, I was always scared of the dark, of ghosts and demons coming to get me from bedroom closets in the blackness of the night, of being possessed, against my will—just like that girl in the movie *The Exorcist*, losing my soul to some supernatural, bean-soup-regurgitating *other*. As far as I know, it has never happened, but the thought is harrowing enough. And besides the terror of demonism, it must also be rather embarrassing to get possessed. What do you say to people afterward, once you come to? How do you apologize for that, go on with your life as though it never happened? It would be just as bad, I think, if the “other” in question were “Holy,” and I were sitting in my god-mother’s friend’s tiny living room-qua-church on a sunny Sunday morning. But how much worse still if I were possessed by “something else”? Someone else? Some other kind of spirit? Demons, demons everywhere. I know that if there are demons, they must be all around me on Amsterdam Avenue this night, especially as I make my return from the library at midnight, the witching hour—evil architectural books in my grasp and demonically coded, crumpled-up dollar bills in my front pockets.

I start talking out loud to myself in the rain—first singing a song. It might have been an old Negro spiritual. Or maybe a gospel tune? “And I’m glad, I’m glad, I’m glad that God made John.” But then my thoughts and words change drastically: “Is this white dude following me, the one with the green, oval glasses?” “That corner looks strange, weird. This alley, too.” And I can’t even begin to form thoughts about what kinds of wicked goblins lay waiting in the expanse of the park across the street from my new apartment building. I try to laugh myself out of it, walking briskly, almost jogging, my pulse strong and fast. Somehow, I eventually make it home. When I do, once I do, I bolt the door, sneak peeks outside from my guarded first-floor window, and wait the dark night out.

Maybe anthropologists have a hard time dealing with their own culture because it won’t be quiet to criticism, won’t quiet down and just be talked about, won’t shut up and be studied, already. Forcing monologues into dialogues, or even glossalia-like conversational free-for-alls, it insists on talking back—and in a language that the anthropologist knows all too well. Like a real thing. Irrepressibly ethnographrenic. Too many voices, too much backtalk, can make one crazy, ethnographically speaking, especially when every voice wants to be on equal footing.⁴⁸ As a teenager, I used to sleep with the lights on at night. I still do—sometimes. I am still afraid of the dark, to write it, to read it, to even think it—especially when the darkness can speak back.

The next day Anthroman is writing tons of notes, even more than usual, scribblings about Satanism and how “The State” is made magical, fictional, and real all at once; about the WTU’s distrust of government agencies, a distrust that is foundational for most conspiracy theories.⁴⁹ That same night, some eighteen hours after my midnight library trip, I bring the Drexler books to Thomas, Bigs, and their buddy Damon, who first introduced me to the idea of “soultheft.” The three look the stuff over carefully. They all agree that “this has to be the guy,” or at least a clue to his existence. And they bet that if we examine the buildings closely, we will “catch him telling on himself because,” I’m reminded, “Esau always, always does.”

After we talk for an hour about Drexler, architecture, and anthropology, I read them the title for an early draft of this very chapter, preliminarily titled, “The Satanic State: White Conspiracies and Black Prejudices.” Immediately, Damon jumps up to take issue.

“Black folk can’t be prejudice,” he declares, shaking his head and waving his hands emphatically. “The way I see it, it’s like this and shit: Prejudice means to prejudge. To judge before the facts. To prejudge someone is to judge before you meet them. Like what the Europeans did when they were on their merry way to Africa for slaves. They judged before they knew. Now, after four hundred years of living through slavery, and the slave trade, and all that shit, after seeing racism and genocide and all that, we can’t ever be labeled prejudgers of shit. We are judging, but it is after over four hundred years of evidence has been rolling in on these motherfuckers. If we are anything, we are *postjudice*. We judge them based on their history. Based on knowing what they are capable of doing. Black folk can’t be prejudice. We are postjudice, and that is just using your God-given common sense and knowing your damn history.”

real real. It has no power above and beyond the social contract. This position is complicated further in chapter 8, “Real Names.”

34. For a discussion of virginity and orgasms as gendered fakery, see Marjorie Garber, “The Insincerity of Women,” in *Desire in the Renaissance: Psychoanalysis and Literature*, ed. Valeria Finucci and Regina Schwartz (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

35. Ambiguity is not a silver bullet. For a discussion of ambivalence’s political inadequacies (especially for anthropological theorizing), see Rosalind Morris, “‘All Made Up’: Performance Studies and the New Anthropology of Sex and Gender,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 567–92. Also see Jennifer Michael Hecht, *The End of Soul: Scientific Modernity, Atheism, and Anthropology in France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), for an examination of how doubt can be codified into an explicit form of certainty.

36. See Ann Weinstone, *Avatar Bodies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); and John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

37. This is also a rearticulation (on different terrain) of Donna Haraway’s long-term project, an attempt to de-essentialize our understandings of species and speciation.

38. Bill Maher (during his HBO show *Real Time*) and other reviewers consistently labeled Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) a “sincere” film immediately after its release.

39. For a definition of “dialectical criticism,” see Steven Caton, *Lawrence of Arabia: A Film’s Anthropology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999).

40. For critical race studies, it might even be important to ask if bodies are possessed by a black or white ghosts. Think of the sincerities and insincerities of Jean Rouch’s *The Mad Masters* (1954), practitioners possessed by former white colonial officers and administrators, which can be read as a religiously inflected postcolonial critique. Tyrone’s move might likewise be seen as resistive, an everyday practice of religiosity that challenges the powers that be—that fights hegemonic discourses with dizzying tactilities and re-embodiments.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. “You Remind Me of Something” is a 1995 song from R. Kelly. Even as a Top Ten hit, it was lampooned by many listeners who thought it odd (and off-ensive) that Kelly penned a love song explicitly equating women with Jeeps, other cars, and bank accounts. It is also explicitly rehearses the human/thing dialectic that the sincere/authentic distinction further thematizes.

2. “Evanescent forms are becoming clearer, and confusion is being slowly dispelled. What has happened is that time has passed. Forgetfulness, by rolling memories along in its tide, has done more than merely wear them down or consign them to oblivion. The profound structure it has created out of the fragments allows me to achieve a more stable equilibrium, and to see a clearer pattern.” This counterintuitively productive aspect of forgetting (of going back

to old fieldwork after many years), can be found in Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 43–44. For another poignant version of self-remembering, see Samuel R. Delaney, *The Motion of Light in Water: Sex and Science Fiction Writing in the East Village, 1957–1965* (New York: Arbor House, 1988), especially “Sentences: An Introduction.” For a more substantive discussion of Brooklyn’s history, including the creation of its racial ghettos, see Craig Steven Wilder, *A Covenant with Color: Race and Social Power in Brooklyn* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); and Walter Thabit, *How East New York Became a Ghetto* (New York: New York University Press, 2003). For a specific look at Crown Heights in the 1950s (as West Indians were just beginning to make inroads into the neighborhood), see Mark D. Naison, *White Boy: A Memoir* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002).

3. When I wrote the first draft of this chapter in 1994–95, I used a heavy-handed form of “eye-dialect” (representing ethnic speech phonetically) to textually (and unscientifically) render the pronunciation differences of West Indian accents. Although I employed this technique inconsistently (and with less than optimal linguistic rigor), I decided to keep most of the instances intact from that earlier, published draft—if for no other reason than to mark my thought processes and representational predilections at one particular moment in ethnographic time. For a more substantive discussion of eye-dialect, see Michael Toolan, “The Significations of Representing Dialect in Writing,” *Language and Literature: Journal of the Poetics and Linguistics Association* 1, no. 1 (1992): 29–46.

4. For a discussion of Jamaican politics in a transnational perspective, see Laurie Gunst, *Born Fi’ Dead: A Journey through the Jamaican Posse Underworld* (New York: Owl, 1996).

5. See Georges Bataille, *The Impossible* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1991).

6. Equally noticeable is the public invisibility of black female WTU members, which is not surprising, given the gender inequalities usually inherent in conservative interpretations of traditional religious mandates. This is related to the Pauline pronouncements I mentioned in the last chapter. In a future project, I want to examine how the WTU’s gender differences work themselves out once the group’s cable-access cameras are turned off, their display tables folded up, and their very public performances complete.

7. For a discussion of “cultural paranoia” and “the performance of paranoia,” see Patrick O’Donnell, *Latent Destinies: Cultural Paranoia and Contemporary U.S. Narrative* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), particularly “Entry: The Time of Paranoia.” Also see Peter Knight, *Conspiracy Culture: From the Kennedy Assassinations to the “X-Files”* (London: Routledge, 2000); and Peter Knight, ed., *Conspiracy Nation: The Politics of Paranoia in Postwar America* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

8. For a discussion of contemporary rhetorics of global transparency and their skeptical critiques, see Harry G. West and Todd Sanders, eds., *Conspiracy and Transparency: Ethnographies of Suspicion in the New World Order* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

9. For a substantive discussion of early Black Judaism, see James E. Landing, *Black Judaism: Story of an American Movement* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2002).

10. See Arthur Huff Fauset, *Black Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

11. For a canonical study of Rastafari, see Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1994).

12. See Sydney P. Freedberg, *Brother Love: Murder, Money, and a Messiah* (New York: Pantheon, 1994).

13. For a historically contextualized anthology on Black Judaism, see Yvonne Chireau and Nathaniel Deutsch, eds., *Black Zion: African American Religious Encounters with Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). For an ethnography of Black Judaism in contemporary Israel, see Fran Markowitz, Sara Helman, and Dafna Shir-Vertesh, "Soul Citizenship: The Black Hebrews and the State of Israel," *American Anthropologist* 105, no. 2 (2003): 302-12. See also, Rudolph Windsor, *From Babylon to Timbuktu: A History of the Ancient Black Races Including the Black Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Windsor's Golden Series Publications, 1988). Furthermore, there are also versions of Sabbath-keeping in Africa (Shembeism in South Africa and "Saturday God" worship in Ghana) that lend themselves to analytical discussion in this context. For a discussion of the latter, see Kofi Owusu-Mensa, *Saturday God and Adventism in Ghana* (Frankfurt, Germany: Peter Lang, 1993).

14. Howard Brotz, *The Black Jews of Harlem: Negro Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Negro Leadership* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964). James Landing, in *Black Judaism*, disputes several of Brotz's claims about this group. For a contemporary ethnographic discussion of conflicts between WTU Jews and Lubavitch Hasidim, see Henry Goldschmidt, *Peoples Apart: Race, Religion, and Other Jewish Differences in Crown Heights* (PhD diss., University of California at Santa Cruz, 2002), especially chap. 5.

15. Landing, *Black Judaism*, especially chaps. 2 and 3.

16. *Ibid.*, chaps. 9 and 10.

17. *Ibid.*, chap. 10; and see the Web site for the Beth Elohim Hebrew Congregation in Queens: <http://members.aol.com/Blackjews/>. Rabbi Sholomo Ben Levy, the "spiritual leader" of the group, received his doctorate in history from Columbia University while I was finishing my own doctoral program there in anthropology.

18. Nelson George, *Buppies, B-Boys, Baps, and Bohos: Notes on Post-Soul Black Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001), 157.

19. For a discussion linking Ice-T's "Cop Killer" to "Bush Killa," a 1992 hip-hop offering from West Coast emcee Paris, see Mark Anthony Neal, *Songs in the Key of Black Life: A Rhythm and Blues Nation* (New York: Routledge, 2003), especially 186-88.

20. Walter Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), especially "Critique of Violence."

21. Thomas was referencing the earlier World Trade Center bombing of 1993, not September 11. For a discussion of COINTELPRO (the government's

infamous counterintelligence program) see Ward Churchill and Jim Van der Wall, *COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret Wars against Domestic Dissent* (Boston: South End Press, 1990).

22. In December of 1993, Colin Ferguson, thirty-five, a Jamaican-born New Yorker, opened fire on a Long Island Railroad car full of whites, allegedly waiting until the train left the city, not wanting to embarrass New York's first black mayor, David Dinkins. With notes to himself expressing hatred for Asians, whites, and "Uncle Toms," Ferguson killed six people and injured nineteen others. He was finally subdued by passengers when he tried to reload his gun with hollow-point bullets for another round of shooting.

23. Paul Laurence Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask," first published in *Lyrical of Lowly Life* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1896). Adam Lively uses the mask motif as a guiding metaphor for his historical discussion of racial reasoning in *Masks: Blackness, Race, and the Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

24. See William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, *Black Rage* (New York: Basic Books, 1968).

25. For a discussion of these very conspiracies and their circulation within the black community, see Patricia A. Turner, *I Heard It Through the Grapevine: Rumor in African-American Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993); and Gary Alan Fine and Patricia A. Turner, *Whispers on the Color Line: Rumor and Race in America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001). For a paradigmatic analysis of the "paranoid style" in American culture as a response to imagined communist infiltrations of the 1950s (and even earlier), see Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1966).

26. See James Jones, *Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment* (New York: Free Press, 1993).

27. The hip-hop group Brand Nubian has almost the same rendition of the ankh in their song "Dance to My Ministry," from the album *One for All* (Elektra, 1990): "come, into my laboratory / I'ma take you on a tour / An ankh is the key and the key is knowledge / which unlocks my lab's door / Kemet lets you enter, heat generates from the center / Lord Jamar's an inventor. . . . To the Right is where I keep my fuel / The Qu'ran and 120 lessons." They hint at an entrenched discourse based on popular versions of Egyptology and Islam.

28. Derrick goes back to several texts as his main reference material (in this conversation and others we share), most especially Anthony T. Browder, *From the Browder File: Twenty-two Essays on the African American Experience* (Washington, DC: The Institute of Karmic Guidance, 1989), which analyzes everything from the significance of Egyptian iconography on the dollar bill to "the mysteries of melanin" and the keys to healthy eating.

29. See Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), a fictional thriller that unravels a global conspiracy to marginalize the iconic status of Mary Magdalen within Christianity (and her fictionally posited marriage to Jesus Christ).

30. For an anthropological anthology that places conspiracy theorizing within a certain, expanded notion of rationality (and does not just dismiss it as a mechanism for avoiding real discussions about social issues and their potential amelioration), see George E. Marcus, ed., *Paranoia within Reason: A Casebook on Conspiracy as Explanation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

31. For an accessible overview of structural functionalism as theoretical orientation, see George Ritzer, *Sociological Theory* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1992).

32. Edward William Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2003). First published in the mid-nineteenth century.

33. I am thinking here of texts like, Molefi Kete Asante, *Kemet, Afrocentricity, and Knowledge* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990).

34. For a discussion of networking systematicity and totalization and how it short-circuits conventional causal modeling in the social sciences, see Anne-lise Riles, *The Network Inside Out* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

35. Many people in the community often compared the two places, referencing a 1990 *New England Journal of Medicine* study arguing that men in the poverty-stricken country of Bangladesh live longer than those in this Northern Manhattan neighborhood (Colin McCord and Harold P. Freeman, “Excess Mortality in Harlem,” *New England Journal of Medicine* 322, no. 3 [January 18, 1990]: 173–78).

36. Edward Said, quoted in Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 133. For a discussion of conspiratorial populism and paranoia, see Mark Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

37. See Mark Liechty, *Suitably Modern: Making Middle-Class Culture in a New Consumer Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), especially chaps. 6 and 7.

38. See Revelation 3:9—“Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.”

39. To complicate matters even more, the group of approximately 2,500 Black Hebrew Israelites presently residing in Israel (started from a group that left the south side of Chicago in the late 1960s and entered Israel with a rhetoric that demanded the country’s “fake Jews” leave immediately) still maintains a sense of African identity today, officially calling themselves “African Hebrew Israelites.” Moreover, they have jettisoned much of their anti-Semitic rhetoric in an effort to gain full citizenship from the Israeli state, cutting off their ties with, say, Nation of Islam minister Louis Farrakhan as a sign of good faith.

40. Anthroman smilingly divulges, more for himself than their edification, the little he knows about the notion of commodity fetishism, a certain economic anthropomorphism of inanimate goods that seems, somehow, rele-

vant in this context. See Karl Marx, *Capital* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1939).

41. For an evocative ethnographic look at individuals connected to the Branch Davidian movement (a disavowed offshoot of Seventh-Day Adventism), see James D. Faubion, *The Shadows of Waco* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). Also, this hyperbolic imagining of an all-out race war (with “Branch Davidians . . . dropping bombs from helicopters right over Harlem”) reached a feverish pitch on the eve of Y2K, when the FBI placed the WTU Jews on their “Project Megiddo” list of potential terrorists, which many labeled an updated version of COINTELPRO.

42. Here are some of the titles from our reading list: John Coleman, *Conspirators’ Hierarchy: The Story of the Committee of Three Hundred* (Carson City, NJ: America West, 1992), whose author, a former “professional intelligence officer” in Europe, explains a worldwide plot by Satanists to set up a One-World Government and eliminate “all national identity and national pride” so as to destroy the world with corrupted religions, pornography, terrorism, and a global economic policy of starvation and deprivation based on the eighteenth-century writings of Thomas Malthus; Moshe Yohanan Lewis, *History of Edom: The Imposter Jew* (1989, with no publishing information except the fact that Yohanan Lewis holds the copyright), which likens the nation of Israel to an invading army that has used its economic resources to impose foreign interests on the people of America; Arkon Daraul, *A History of Secret Societies* (New York: Citadel Press, 1961), which shows the ubiquity of secret societies around the world; and A. Ralph Epperson, *The New World Order* (Tucson, AZ: Publius Press, 1990), a fast-paced gallop through the Satanist underpinnings of contemporary calls for a new world order. As might be expected within a discourse of conspiracy theory, there was a strong anti-Semitic thrust to much of this literature. We also read through the Bible (including the Apocrypha).

43. This extra-phenotypicity is what it shares with notions of sincerity, but toward very different identificatory ends. I’ll unpack this more later on.

44. Epperson’s *New World Order* opens with Catholic popes from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries warning of the “occult forces” behind Communism. As a Seventh-Day Adventist, I actually grew up awaiting the rejuvenation of national “blue laws” (against buying and selling on Sunday), which would be part of a larger plot spearheaded by the pope, the anti-Christ, who would seek to destroy God’s Seventh-Day (Saturday) Sabbath keepers. I even brought the guys a copy of one book that argues just such a theory, A. Jan Marcussen, *National Sunday Law* (Thompsonville, IL: Amazing Truth Publications, 1991), which sets the scene for its argument with a discussion of the Iraq/Kuwait conflict in the Middle East. The WTUers are particularly intrigued by the book’s numerical verification of the pope’s status as anti-Christ, an adding up of the Roman numerals that make up the name *Vivarius Filii Dei* (Vicar of the Son of God) to get 666. Revelation 13:38: “Count the number of the beast; for it is the number of a man; and his number is six hundred threescore and six.”

45. For another rendition of the state's magical powers, see Michael Tausig, *The Magic of the State* (New York: Routledge, 1997) or Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

46. See Ralph Ellison, "A Very Stern Discipline," *Harper's*, March 1967, 76–77.

47. I'm not sure about the significance of the phrase "white blood" here, especially when "blood" might be imagined as a way to talk about commonality and kinship. Possibly, the warlock's renunciation of witchcraft brought him a bit closer to the Black Israelite fold, along with his divulgence of such important secrets.

48. Marilyn Strathern, "Out of Context: The Persuasive Fiction of Anthropology," *Current Anthropology* 28, no. 3 (June 1987): 251–81: "The observer/observed relationship can no longer be assimilated to that between subject and object. The object(ive) is a joint production. Many voices, multiple texts, plural authorship" (264–65).

49. For a discussion of conspiracy theories as a response to "bureaucratic impersonality," see Frederic Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993). In his discussion of racial conspiracies among blacks, in which "Jews increasingly become the prime suspects," Charles W. Mills categorizes Jameson's take on conspiracy theories in his *Postmodernity, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991) as follows: "Frederic Jameson suggests that the conspiracy theory is a kind of half-baked Hegelianism, a degraded attempt at the whole. There is a lot to this, but I would add that it is an attempt to think the whole with the political and psychological virtue of *highlighting human agency*" (*Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998], 89).

CHAPTER FIVE

1. Al Sharpton's National Action Network shared a building with the WTU Black Hebrews in the 1990s. An electrical fire destroyed much of that space in January 2003. One of the WTUers had to be rescued by city firefighters.

2. For a discussion that explicitly links the "marketplace of ideas" to Habermasian notions of the public sphere (in a broader critique about the democratizing limits of free speech in certain national contexts), see Jack Snyder and Karen Ballentine, "Nationalism and the Marketplace of Ideas," *International Security* 21, no. 2 (1996): 5–40.

3. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989) for a foundational articulation of how rational-critical debate/discourse helped to constitute political modernity. Of course, many scholars argue that an irrational xenophobia and exclusionism (far more pronounced than Habermas allows) has always defined this discursive space. For an anthology that highlights some of these critiques (as well as Habermas's own reassessment of his earlier formulation), see Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and*