

Black Souls Rising: Caribbean Religions in Connecticut

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The Rastafari

Introduction

The Rastafari and the Dread are religio-political movements that are 20th century phenomena.

They address issues of economic injustice in the world.

They oppose the political hegemony of whites and the social institutions that perpetuate them.

The multinational corporations are the sources of social and economic inequality, the existence of social classes and injustices against the poor.

They resist the establishment in theological terms nuanced with an apocalyptic (millenarian) orientation.

They teach that blacks were brought against their will to the New World and will return to Africa.

They believe that Ethiopia or Africa in general is the promise land.

History of the Rastafari

No religious movement appears from nowhere. Religion is part of a society and the events of the past leave their mark on the rise of a new movement.

1. George Liele : The Ethiopian Baptists or The Native Baptists - 1783.

- . A.K.A. as George Sharpe, the name of his slave master in Savannah, Georgia.
- . His owner gave George his freedom.
- . He was eventually in the service of Colonel Kirkland, his owner's friend – Colonel being the friend's name.
- . Colonel Kirkland emigrated to Jamaica in 1783 and took George with him.
- . George Sharpe changed his name to George Liele.
- . He founded the first Baptist Church in Jamaica and named it the **Ethiopian Baptist Church**.
- . *Ethiopia* had symbolic value; biblical passages use the word interchangeably with *Nubian* and *Cushites*.
- . *Cush* in Hebrew means *black* or *burned skin*.
- . *Cush* was translated later in the Greek version of the Bible as *ethiop*.
- . By extension Ethiopia is recognized as the land of the burned skin people.
- . Liele later rechristened the church the **Jamaican Baptist Church**.

2. The Great Revival 1860-1920

- . The symbolic value of Ethiopia as a holy place was extolled in Jamaican religious thought during the period of the Great Revival.
- . Many religious movements were born during that period: the Convince, Myalism, Pukumina (Pocomania), and the Bedwardite or the Native Baptists.
- . The Native Baptists (or Bedwardite Church) founded by Alexander Bedward: was born in 1859.
- . On December 29, 1920, he prophesied that the end of the world in December 31; that his "band" of followers would ascend to heaven as the earth and white civilization is to be destroyed by fire.
- . All whites would become subservient to blacks in the world to come.

3. Marcus Garvey and the United Negro Association (UNIA).

- . Marcus Josiah Garvey was born in St. Ann parish on August 17, 1887.
- . He fought against the social injustice of the British colonial government, for higher wages, universal suffrage, the redistribution of land to the disenfranchised.
- . He proclaimed: "Look to Africa and there a king will rise and he will be your messiah."