

In God's Own Image: Race, Politics and Millennialism in the Nation of Islam and Christian Identity Movement

Cameron Rowlett, *University of Colorado Boulder*

Amid a family visit to Concord State Prison, a large correctional facility located thirty-five minutes outside of Boston, Philbert Little began to tell his brother about a growing religious movement he had joined. He called his religion the “Nation of Islam” (NOI), and he claimed it was the “natural religion for the black man.”¹ Philbert’s younger brother Malcolm was not especially receptive to Philbert’s proselytizing at the time. While Malcolm’s fellow inmates had nicknamed him “Satan” on account of his antireligious attitude and blasphemous rhetoric, something about his brother’s effort to convert Malcolm stuck in his mind. Soon after Malcolm’s transfer to a more modern facility in Norfolk, Massachusetts, his older brother Reginald, another recent convert to the NOI, relayed the NOI’s theology to Malcolm. Reginald told Malcolm that God was not a spiritual

1. Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), 158.

being, but a man whose real identity is Allah. His chosen people are the African diaspora, and he embodied a human form in order to awaken African Americans to their true identity. In addition to conveying God's embodied nature and the hidden identity of the Black man to Malcolm, Reginald informed his brother of his religion's demonology. "The white man is the devil," Reginald told Malcolm; and all Whites knew of this secret demonic identity.²

Malcolm reflected on his life, visiting memories of the White people he had known and White America's effect on him. White supremacists from the Black Legion were responsible for his family's multiple relocations, and, in all likelihood, the murder of his father. White state employees broke up his family and institutionalized his mother, while the White students and teachers at his school hurled slurs at him.³ The depravity, perversion, and evil of White people became a truth in his memory. This was Malcolm's first serious step toward conversion.⁴ As he educated himself, studying every book he could in his prison's library, his dedication to the NOI grew. Eventually Malcolm succeeded in establishing a correspondence with the leader of the NOI, Elijah Muhammad (1897–1975).⁵ Upon his release from prison Malcolm joined the NOI – quickly coming its most renowned and popular minister – and also adopted the letter "X" to represent the African name

2. Malcolm X and Haley, *The Autobiography*, 156–164.

3. Malcolm X and Haley, *The Autobiography*, 4–30.

4. Malcolm X and Haley, *The Autobiography*, 122–123.

5. Malcolm X and Haley, *The Autobiography*, 172.

taken from him by slavery.⁶ His conversion to the Nation – beginning with the acceptance of his new identity as a member of Allah’s chosen and his adoption of the Nation’s doctrinal beliefs and behavioral regulations – corresponded with a psychological change in Malcolm. Cornel West posits that this change represents a *psychic conversion* extending beyond the standard effects of adopting a new religious identity: Malcolm’s conversion helped him acquire a new socio-religious history, provided new meaning for his life’s trials, and, in doing so, gave him the freedom to view himself independently of how White society viewed him.⁷

Belief in a hidden identity can represent a source of power – especially in the face of political oppression – and this is as true for the NOI as it is for other racialized theologies. Even amongst populations that face no oppression on account of race, racialized theologies help establish new sources of historical meaning for adherents. White-exclusive new religious movements also possess the aptitude for constructing racialized myths that mark them as God’s chosen and provide a new sense of meaning in response to changing social contexts. The Christian Identity movement, like the NOI, is a twentieth century American new religious movement that prioritizes belief in a racialized mythology laden with millennialist motifs. These theologies strongly affect adherents’ sense of meaning and identity, and often precipitate their participation in various political activities, some of which

6. Malcolm X and Haley, *The Autobiography*, 203.

7. Cornel West, “Malcolm X and Black Rage,” in *Malcolm X: In Our Own Image*, ed. Joe Wood (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), 48–49.

exist on the radical fringes of American society. Both movements promote a racial separatism that often corresponds with a belief in the impending apocalypse and is justified through their interpretation of established scriptures (i.e., the Qur'an and the Bible).

The present work will explore the racialized mythologies central to the NOI and Christian Identity through a comparative analysis of the histories, functions, and implications of these myths, with special attention paid to the millennialist beliefs of each. I argue that these mythologies represent a reconstruction of the social dynamics of racial dominance, a reconstruction founded upon the revelation of a hidden identity that serves to edify adherents to their true religious positionality with respect to God/Allah. Due to the powerful influence of millennialism within both movements, these reconstructed identities and their accompanying theologies encourage and enable potentially radical political rhetoric and action. Moreover, this rhetoric and action manifests in stark difference between the two movements, displaying asymmetrical relationships to political power. I conclude by considering the political manifestations of both movements in relation to their use of violence, offering a reflection on the relationship between violence and social positionality.⁸

8. For the purposes of this paper, I rely in part on the comparative methodology proposed by Caroline Walker Bynum in her 2014 article, "Avoiding the Tyranny of Morphology; or, Why Compare?" Bynum's methodology acknowledges the problematic tendencies of comparative analysis within the study of religion and offers a methodology to help establish more substantive conclusions. Instead of direct comparison,

While both are homegrown American theologies from twentieth century new religious movements, the polarity of racial power between Identity Christians and NOI adherents indicates that, although these groups exist within the same national context, they occupy entirely different social realities.⁹ The legal, economic, and social institutions of the United States offer different forms of citizenship to Black and White Americans. Bolstered by the invisible institution of White supremacy, this tiered citizenship is regularly reinforced in a wide variety of ways, including discriminatory hiring and employment practices, inequitable housing and lending practices, exposure to higher levels of state surveillance and violence, and a paucity of effective political representation. However obvious it may seem, it is critical to articulate that the racialized theologies compared below are not equitably created. They come from different populations in different socio-cultural contexts with disparate degrees of political power and agency.

Millennialism

As the religious current of millennialism weighs so heavily within the respective theologies of Christian Identity

Bynum suggests that comparative work should explore “the ways in which each phenomenon is embedded in, and raises questions about, its own cultural context. As a mathematician might say, $A:B::A':B'$,’ The comparison is not between A and A’ but between the two relationships” (Bynum, “Avoiding the Tyranny of Morphology; or, Why Compare?” in *History of Religions* [Berkeley: University of Chicago Press, 2014], 354).
9. This will be discussed in detail in the analysis section of this article.

and the NOI, a brief examination of this current is necessary for the analysis that follows. Within its most narrow Christian context, millennialism refers to the biblical millennium, when Jesus will return to usher in and reign over a utopic community of the faithful (i.e., the millennial kingdom) for a thousand-year period. More generally, millennialism is the belief in a collective, total, and final transformation of society that will usher in a post-historical epoch of peace and prosperity. In addition to its finality, this transformation is also understood to be imminent, and many who subscribe to millennialist beliefs interpret incidents of societal upheaval – such as war, famine, or widespread political unrest – as signs of the approaching end times. Millennialism is often used interchangeably with “millenarianism,” and both terms ultimately derive from the aforementioned Christian context.¹⁰ However, the former often carries a greater religious connotation than the latter, as millenarianism can just as aptly describe secular beliefs and movements, such as Marxism.¹¹

10. Catherine Wessinger, “Catastrophic Millennialism,” in *Encyclopedia of Millennialism*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Loyola University New Orleans, 2017), <http://people.loyno.edu/~wessing/law/Encyclopedia/2.catastrophic.html>. For more on millennialism, see also: Catherine Wessinger, “Millennialism with and Without the Mayhem,” in *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements*, ed. Thomas Robbins and Susan J. Palmer (New York: Routledge, 1997), 47–52; Catherine Wessinger, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

11. For a brief examination of millenarian thought in Marxism, see David T. Byrne, “The Victory of the Proletariat is Inevitable: The Millenarian Nature of Marxism” *Kritike* 5, no. 2 (December 2011): 59–67.

Millennialism in the twentieth century United States often takes the form of what Catherine Wessinger calls “catastrophic millennialism,” which centralizes the apocalyptic event(s) that will signal the coming millennium. According to Wessinger, catastrophic millennialism utilizes a deeply pessimistic view of human nature and society, seeing humans as “so evil and corrupt that the old order has to be destroyed violently to make way for the perfected millennial kingdom.”¹² This belief entwines with a dualistic worldview that posits reality in terms good versus evil, the elect versus the reprobate, us versus them. The faithful are stuck in this conflict until the collective apotheosis of the apocalypse rewards their faith and punishes their opponents. Despite its pessimism, catastrophic millennialism appeals to “the perennial human desire to achieve permanent well-being that is at the heart of the religious quest.”¹³ It promises not only a transcendence of life’s suffering, but also helps explain why that suffering persists for the elect. Catastrophic millennialism thus provides a lens to justify a myriad of tribulations – natural disasters, political upheavals, calamities that befall the specific millennial group, all can be explained as components of a larger cosmic narrative.

Protestant fundamentalists are perhaps the largest and most visible group of catastrophic millennialists in the United States. Despite their political proximity to the American far-right, Christian Identity adherents outright reject the catastrophic millennialism of fundamentalists. Specifically,

12. Wessinger, “Catastrophic Millennialism,” para. 2.

13. Wessinger, “Catastrophic Millennialism,” para. 1.

they eschew any interpretation of events that suggests a timeline for the apocalypse, and, moreover, reject how the dispensationalism of fundamentalists centralizes the history of the Jewish people in the fulfillment of Christian eschatology.¹⁴ While Identity Christians and fundamentalists are thus both aptly described as premillennialists due to their belief that Jesus will arrive at some time during the apocalypse prior to the millennial kingdom, many Identity Christians reject the existence of a rapture prior to the apocalypse and instead contend that the apocalypse is already at hand and that they are living through it.¹⁵ As this project will explore in the next section, Identity Christians utilize a virulently anti-Semitic interpretation of sacred history that relegates the Jewish people to enemies of the elect and it is this racialized reading of the apocalypse and sacred history that ultimately makes the millennialism of Christian fundamentalists and Identity Christians irreconcilable.

It is the racialization of Christian Identity's catastrophic millennialism that obliges the thematic connection between the millennialism of a far-right Christian group and the millennialism of the ostensibly Muslim NOI. However, the NOI draws upon an idiosyncratic sacred history that inverts the dynamics of racial dominance under White supremacism. As this paper will explore below, while the morphology of the

14. Michael Barkun, "Racist Apocalypse: Millennialism on the Far Right," *American Studies* 31, No. 2 (Fall 1990): 125.

15. Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 213.

NOI and Christian Identity's millennialism overlap in their explicit racialization, how this racialization operates, the function it serves, and the political action it inspires, is far from equivalent. What both communicate, however, is an enduring concern about the relationship between religious and racial identity in the United States and how the dynamics of race can factor into a religious group's ultimate concerns; that is, their eschatology.

The Christian Identity Movement and Its Antecedents

The foundational concern present in Christian Identity's foremost antecedent, British-Israelism, is the forgotten, or "hidden," lineage of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. According to biblical account, Israel split into two kingdoms after the reign of Solomon, with the northern kingdom containing ten of the twelve tribes of Jacob, and the southern kingdom comprising the remaining two. Around 150 years before the razing of the First Temple in Jerusalem, the Assyrians conquered the entirety of the northern kingdom, exiling its inhabitants.¹⁶ While the destruction and subsequent exile of the southern kingdom at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar eventually saw the return of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin

16. In the ancient Near East the Neo-Assyrian empire would frequently deport and resettle subject populations to prevent rebellion and reconfigure newly annexed territories.

to Jerusalem, the ten tribes of the northern kingdom were “lost” after the Assyrian Exile.¹⁷

The first indisputable British-Israelist, Richard Brothers (1757–1824), began to have millennialist visions in 1791, and by 1793 began to incorporate the narrative of the Ten Lost Tribes into his millennialist worldview. More specifically, Brothers contended that “most Jews were hidden among existing European, and particularly British peoples, unaware of their exalted biblical lineage,”¹⁸ and, moreover, that he had been chosen by God to reveal this hidden identity and thereby precipitate the return of the Lost Tribes to Israel. While Brothers never achieved much of a following in his lifetime – he was declared insane in 1795 and institutionalized until 1806, by which point he had lost most of the followers he had – what is of interest to the present discussion is his idea of a “hidden Israel” dispersed among exclusively White populations, as this forms the central motif of British-Israelism. In other words, while Brothers is correctly identified as the first British-Israelist due to his role in constructing the movement’s central motif, it would be another thirty-four years before anyone attempted to give the idea of a hidden Israel the historical and theological legitimacy it needed to make British-Israelism an established movement.

The first pseudo-historical justification for the idea of a hidden Israel comes from John Wilson (1799–1871) in his

17. Leonard Zeskind, *The “Christian Identity” Movement: Analyzing Its Theological Rationalization for Racist and Anti-Semitic Violence* (Atlanta: Nation Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA), 16–17.

18. Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 6.

influential work, *Lectures on Our Israelitish Origin*, where he claims to have “discovered the true origins of the nations of Northern Europe.”¹⁹ As Barkun explains, “this work, together with Wilson’s lectures and the periodicals he edited, brought the British-Israel message to a large middle-class audience. The *Lectures* depended less on the interpretation of biblical prophecy than on Wilson’s attempt to demonstrate empirically that the lost tribes had in fact migrated from the Near East to Europe.”²⁰ Wilson’s attempt at empirical demonstration relied heavily on poorly done philology,²¹ through which, Barkun explains, Wilson came to draw a sharp distinction between

the southern kingdom of Judah, from which Jews were deemed to have sprung, and the northern kingdom of Israel, the ancestors of the British and other European peoples. Hence, Jews bore only those divine promises God had given to the few tribes that dwelt in Judah, while the bulk of the prophecies were inherited by descendants of the tribes that dwelt in Israel – preeminently the tribe of Ephraim, which populated the British Isles. In addition, Wilson was skeptical of Jewish claims to undiluted descent from biblical ancestors. Patterns of intermarriage [...] had intermixed Judah’s descendants with [...] ‘the worst of the Gentiles,’ [causing them to inherit] the Gentiles curse, which could only be lifted with the acceptance of Jesus. Thus Wilson’s attitude toward the Jews was both fraternal and patronizing.²²

19. Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 6–8.

20. Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 7.

21. Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 7.

22. Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 7–8.

As the above quotation makes clear, the anti-Semitic implications of British-Israelism were present from its outset. However, it is widely acknowledged that there were a few additional figures – namely, Reuben H. Sawyer (1866–1962), William J. Cameron (1878–1955), and Howard Rand (1889–1991) – who shifted the movement towards something entirely new, openly vitriolic, and potentially dangerous: Christian Identity.²³

While British-Israelist organizations in the nineteenth-century United States often styled themselves as Anglo-Israelist, this alternative moniker was relatively short-lived, eventually being replaced by the more encompassing category of Christian Identity. According to Danny W. Davis, what Identity Christianity adds to British-Israelism and distinguishes it as a separate movement are five doctrinal beliefs related to a racialized reading of the biblical creation story. The first of these establishes that there are two types of human beings that are distinguished by paternity. The first type, “Adamites,” descended from the line of Adam and Eve through their son Seth and represented God’s chosen – that is to say, White, Anglo-Saxon, Aryans. The second type, the “pre-Adamites,” were present thousands of years before Adam and Eve and were tainted due to race-mixing. The second doctrinal belief posits that the pre-Adamites were satanic Jews,

23. Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 31–38. Sawyer was the leader of the Ku Klux Klan in Oregon in the early 1920s, Cameron was an editor, publisher, and personal press secretary for Henry Ford, and Rand was a lawyer who founded one of the most influential British-Israel organizations in the United States, the Anglo-Saxon Federation of America.

created by the Devil himself. Following from this, the third belief holds that the serpent in the garden was not actually a reptile, but a humanoid who is either in league with the Devil or the Devil himself. The serpent then seduced Eve, constituting the Original Sin and resulting in the birth of Cain. Drawing from the first three, the fourth doctrinal belief establishes that there are two “seedlines” of humanity, one proceeding from Adam and Eve, the other from Eve and Satan through Cain. This latter line – which is dedicated to thwarting God’s plan for eternity – feeds into the fifth and final doctrinal belief, which posits that Cain’s propensity for evil was passed down to his descendants.²⁴ These emerging beliefs were in part the product of work conducted by Dominick M’Causland (1806–1873), Alexander Winchell (1824–1891), David Davidson (1884–1956), and Sydney (Ellen) Bristowe (1862–1952), work which incorporated investigative techniques ranging from biblical analysis and linguistics to archeology and pyramidology.²⁵ However suspect these techniques were in establishing their conclusions, these projects helped cement what little established orthodoxy Christian Identity enjoys. These doctrines oblige a radically alternative reading of Genesis, one which not only explicitly racializes the narrative, but also implies that the Original Sin in the Garden was not disobedience to God as is traditionally understood, but rather interracial sexual relations. Of course, the most shocking

24. Danny W. Davis, *Phinehas Priesthood: Violent Vanguard of the Christian Identity Movement* (Westport, CT: Praegar, 2010), 17.

25. Davis, *Phinehas Priesthood*, 17.

product of these doctrines is that the Jewish people are not only satanic, but literally and biologically descended from Satan.

This theory of satanic Jewish origins aligned with prevailing anti-Semitic conspiracy theories in the early to middle twentieth century, which saw the Jews as wholly other from White Christians, thus serving to provide a theological justification for far-right suspicions of a Jewish world conspiracy. The origin of some of these suspicions derive from the czarist forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a work which recounts a meeting between Jewish elders to discuss economic and political strategies for global domination.²⁶ Cameron – along with his employer Henry Ford and a slew of his contemporaries and far right successors – interpreted the document as authentic. Ann Burlein reports that during his editorship at Ford's small newspaper, *The Dearborn Independent*, Cameron wrote articles which “linked the biblical hermeneutics of British Israelism to popular notions of Jewish conspiracy for world domination popularized in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.”²⁷ This blend of theological and secular anti-Semitism, coupled with catastrophic millennialism, is what provides the inspiration for the political acts taken up by Identity Christians.

The seedline theory of Christian Identity helps establish the specific character of Identity Christianity's catastrophic millennialism, as the contrast between the elect and reprobate is not one of orthodoxy or correct religious

26. Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 34.

27. Ann Burlein, *Lift High the Cross: Where White Supremacy and the Christian Right Converge* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002) 39.

practice, but of biology. The “us versus them” framing that accompanies catastrophic millennialism is reconstituted in Identity Christianity to interpret all human history as a cosmic racial conflict between God’s chosen Aryans and Satan’s children. Only after the completion of the timeless cosmic battle between God and Satan can the chosen of God enjoy the exclusively Aryan millennium. Extending to the political realm, Identity Christians seek methods of resistance to counter the Zionist Occupied Government (ZOG), which hides within the political and economic systems of the United States. These governmental forces are in league with Satan to eliminate the White race and culture.²⁸ It is within this context that Identity Christians distrust centralized governments and privilege adherence to God’s law, even at the expense of civil law.²⁹ While this attitude does not inherently necessitate open hostility or violence, Christian Identity’s millennialist sympathies often inspire political actions that include communal reclusion from society, the stockpiling of weapons to protect themselves during the apocalypse, and even armed resistance against the governmental forces they view as in league with Satan. However, Identity Christians generally do

28. Michael Barkun, “Millenarians and Violence: The Case of the Christian Identity Movement” in *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Groups*, ed. Thomas Robbins and Susan J. Parker (New York: Routledge, 1997), 252.

29. James A. Aho, *The Politics of Righteousness: Idaho Christian Patriotism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 13–15. See also Robert H. Churchill, *To Shake Their Guns in the Tyrant’s Face: Libertarian Political Violence and the Origins of the Militia Movement* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press), 168–170.

not see themselves as agents of the Christian millennium, but rather as witnesses to its inception. While some Identity Christian groups have perpetrated acts of terrorism in a real-world enactment of the cosmic conflict against their satanic opponents, it is common for Identity Christians to react to signs of the approaching millennium by a physical withdrawal and separation from society, rather than committing direct acts of political violence. Like many groups of Christian millennialists before them, Identity Christians are assured of their own eventual victory, as God is on their side. The satanic institutions in politics, economics, or culture are assumed to be in a state of decadence and ripe for collapse. The goal for many Identity Christians therefore is not to fight the collapse but to avoid its calamitous effects in hopes that they can cultivate a Christian Identity community that will survive the apocalypse and enjoy the millennium.

The Nation of Islam and Its Antecedents

The early history of the NOI contains a number of gaps, as much of our knowledge about its founder – Wallace Fard – comes from a series of declassified FBI surveillance files that are fraught with contradictions and exaggerations. The FBI never uncovered a verifiable birth certificate for Fard,³⁰ and,

30. Fard claimed to have been born in Mecca in 1877, but an interview with one of his possible aliases, Wallace D. Ford, contradicts this. In an interview with the California State Authorities, Ford reports his birth as occurring in 1891 in Portland, Oregon. Elijah Muhammad, however, believed in Fard's Meccan origins, using this identity as legitimating connection between Fard and traditional Islam.

according to arrest records from 1918, 1926, and 1933, in Los Angeles and Detroit, Fard gave conflicting accounts of his age, race, and background.³¹ His racial ambiguity, which permitted him to pass as anyone from a half-White New Zealander to a light-skinned Indian, facilitated the viability of these fabrications.³² The FBI's investigation deescalated after Fard disappeared without a trace in the spring of 1933, as expending the resources to track him became less and less financially justifiable.³³ Fard's potential inauthenticity does not register in any of Elijah Muhammad's public statements about the NOI founder, and ultimately, Fard's murky background and possible past involvement in criminal activities did not plainly influence the NOI's theological development – in fact, for the NOI's followers, his mysterious past and apparent

31. Dawn-Marie Gibson, *A History of the Nation of Islam: Race, Islam, and the Quest for Freedom* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2012), 24–25.

32. Herbert Berg, *Elijah Muhammad* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2013), 19.

33. Gibson, *History of the Nation*, 21–24. I list Gibson's 1933 date despite historical disagreement over when Fard disappeared. Gibson's source for the date of Fard's disappearance comes from a 1942 FBI interview with Elijah Muhammad, in which Muhammad divulged that his relationship with Fard effectively ended when Detroit Police "forced him to leave the city" in May 1933. In *The Black Muslims in America*, C. Eric Lincoln cites June 1934 as the date of Fard's disappearance, and Berg typically lists 1934, often without specifying a month. Both sources did not have the benefit of the FBI's case file on Fard, relying instead on less exact sources. Berg typically uses Muhammad's *History of the Nation of Islam*, printed in 1993, almost two decades after Muhammad's death. Lincoln's date comes from an article by Erdmann Doane Beynon entitled "The Voodoo Cult among Negro Migrants in Detroit" *American Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 6 (May 1938): 894–907.

disappearance would strengthen the belief that Fard was Allah, who only temporarily assumed a human form.³⁴

Introduced by Fard, the NOI's foundational beliefs have antecedents in two important organizations. Dawn-Marie Gibson suggests that Fard was involved in Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) under the name George Farr, which would help explain the strong Black nationalist elements and Pan-Africanist leanings within the NOI's theology and politics. The NOI's emphasis on economic empowerment also finds a precursor in the UNIA.³⁵ The most apparent influence on Fard was Noble Drew Ali (1886–1929) and his Moorish Science Temple of America (MSTA).³⁶ Ali promoted a racially inspired identity revelation comparable to the proclamations Muhammad would later espouse, and not unlike messages from Christian Identity figures, which aimed

34. See Berg, *Elijah Muhammad*, 19–20, and Martha Lee, *The Nation of Islam: An American Millenarian Movement* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 35. Ford was imprisoned in 1926 for the sale of narcotics, but there is no absolute certainty that Ford and Fard are the same person.

35. Gibson, *History of the Nation*, 25; Berg, *Elijah Muhammad*, 13.

36. Noble Drew Ali was born Timothy Drew in North Carolina and spent most of his childhood in the South. His foray into religious organization began in 1913 with the establishment of his Canaanite Temple in Newark, New Jersey. The Temple split in 1916, and in 1925 Ali migrated to Chicago and established the headquarters of the Moorish Holy Science Temple, which was subsequently renamed the MSTA. He later founded temples in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Detroit. Shortly before his death, he was accused of the murder of a rival from the MSTA (to which Berg feels he was falsely accused). His own death is a significant mystery – accounts range from murder by the hands of local law enforcement, to death by natural causes. See Gibson, *History of the Nation*, 23.

to get their White audience to apprehend their hidden Israelite origins.

Ali's message to African Americans asked them to realize their true dual heritage of race and religion, which he believed to be Moor and Islam, respectively.³⁷ This message relocated African Americans in their own history, and gave a narrative to Black civilization and religion prior to the horrific existential and material consequences of chattel slavery.³⁸ Ali and the MSTA represent the first attempt at a reimagining of African American religio-racial identity, which would develop a deeper history and cosmology under the NOI.³⁹

Fard did not found the NOI claiming to be the living embodiment of Allah. It was his eventual successor, Elijah

37. Emily Suzanne Clark, "Noble Drew Ali's 'Clean and Pure Nation': The Moorish Science Temple, Identity, and Healing," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 16, no. 3 (2013): 32.

38. Herbet Berg, "Mythmaking in the African American Muslim Context: The Moorish Science Temple, the Nation of Islam, and the American Society of Muslims," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73, no. 3 (September 2005): 686.

39. Ali relied on his own scripture for the theological instruction of his followers, and evidence suggests that *The Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple of America* (commonly called *Circle 7 Koran*) was plagiarized from two previous texts. Emily Suzanne Clark splits the *Circle 7 Koran*'s plagiarism into halves, with "the first half [originating] from *The Aquarian Gospel*, a Theosophical text from the first decade of the twentieth century that recounted Jesus' experiences in Egypt, India, and Europe and filled in the years of his life left unaccounted for in the New Testament." The second half of the *Circle 7 Koran* offers rules for everyday life and familial relations, ripping passages from a 1925 Rosicrucian text, *Unto Thee I Grant*. See Clark, "Noble Drew Ali's 'Clean and Pure Nation,'" 30; 35.

Muhammad (then Elijah Poole), who, after hearing Fard speak only twice, declared him the living God. Fard hastily accepted the designation, and immediately began presenting himself as a messianic figure at the next NOI meeting. This event exemplified a lasting tenet of the Nation's doctrine: the belief in the material presence of Allah. This belief contradicts Christian doctrine that God is a spiritual being, but also has two significant implications for NOI adherents. The first implication is a greater acceptance of Fard as the embodied Allah with Elijah Muhammad as his prophet. The second and, for the purposes of this analysis, more important implication, is the focus on materiality over otherworldly salvation.⁴⁰ An embodied material God enacts a material mission to awaken Black people to their status as Allah's chosen on earth, giving meaning to their history of suffering in the Americas and preparing them for their millenarian destiny.

Beyond providing meaning to the oppression of African Americans, the NOI's early doctrine offered a theological explanation for the wickedness of White people, composed of a largely novel cosmology. The NOI taught Blacks were the original inhabitants of the planet, coming to earth around 60 trillion years ago. In this prehistory, all Black persons belonged to the tribe of Shabazz and lived on the enormous planet that was the predecessor of earth. During this time, a massive explosion divided the planet into the present-day earth and moon and the tribe of Shabazz settled in the Nile

40. Lee, *Millenarian Movement*, 32–39.

Valley, living without strife or oppression until the creation of the White race.⁴¹

Martha Lee, paraphrasing from Muhammad's *The Message to the Blackman in America*, recounts the events that ended the tribe of Shabazz's epoch of social harmony, beginning 6,600 years ago:

The tribe's civilization at Mecca was disrupted [...] with the birth of Yakub, a boy destined to 'break peace, kill and destroy his own people with a made enemy.' While playing with steel, Yakub was said to have discovered the principle that unlike attracts and like repels; this idea he transferred to the social realm, determining that to have absolute power over his people, he would have to create an 'unlike man.'⁴²

During a period of social dissatisfaction, Yakub began preaching controversial messages that created unrest and led to his deportation to the island of Pelan (or Patmos) in the Aegean Sea. Following the exile of Yakub and his followers, Yakub began conducting experiments to selectively breed the colour out of the skin of Black people. As his subjects became paler after each successive generation, their physical, psychological, and moral strength also diminished. By the time he concluded his experiments, he had created an immoral race of "devils," who

41. Lee, *Millenarian Movement*, 39. It is worthy of mention that Malcolm X describes the events of NOI's cosmology a little differently on page 168 of his autobiography. Malcolm X contends the tribe of Shabazz, which never existed on earth's planetary precursor, was the creation of a Black scientist.

42. Lee, *Millenarian Movement*, 39.

caused strife wherever they went prior to being exiled to Europe. All attempts at reform and conversion of the White race, once undertaken by Moses himself, failed, and eventually their evil led them to commit atrocities all over the globe.⁴³

Muhammad preached that Black people were living in a liminal period toward the end of a prophesized six-thousand-year period of White dominance, the end of which was said to have begun in 1914. To enact this Black millennial period – which Muhammad theorized as the “Fall of America” – Blacks had to discover their true history and identity. Once free from the White supremacism responsible for all social conflict, Black communities could establish a tranquil society and resume their rightful dominion over the earth as Allah’s chosen.⁴⁴ Muhammad’s millennialism originates from many of the same biblical sources Christian millennialists use to support their ideology. Combining Old Testament prophecies with events from the Book of Revelation and the Qur’an, Muhammad produced curiously modern interpretations of ancient prophecy, such as the signal for the Fall of America. Taken from a one of Ezekial’s prophecies, the mechanism for America’s demise was an enormous air battle between a giant aircraft (dubbed the Mother of Planes), which was a half mile long and a half mile wide, and the demonic White nations.⁴⁵

Reminiscent of the follies of the nineteenth and twentieth century Christian millennialists of the British-Israel and Christian Identity movements, Muhammad made the

43. Lee, *Millenarian Movement*, 39–41.

44. Berg, *Elijah Muhammad and Islam*, 120–121.

45. Lee, *Millenarian Movement*, 47–48.

mistake of interpreting the social upheaval around him as signs of an imminent millennium. He predicted 1965 and 1966 as the years that would mark the end of White dominance and usher the Fall of America. As those years came and went, White dominance showed no signs of a forthcoming collapse, and Muhammad's unrealized millenarian visions proved to be a disappointment to faithful adherents of the NOI. Without specific millenarian stipulations, the NOI lost much of its urgency in the early to middle 1970s. Coupled with the slowly improving conditions for Blacks in the wake of the Civil Rights movement, arguments for racial separation fell upon less responsive ears.⁴⁶

Analysis

Racialized cosmologies reside at the center of both the NOI and Christian Identity, providing the foundation for their respective theologies. The theologies of both religious movements highlight newly interpreted accounts of creation, history, and apocalypse on lines of race, often exemplifying analogous characteristics. Within their own religious contexts, the NOI and Christian Identity's racialized theologies preform the same four interconnected functions: (1) the revelation of a hidden identity of divine chosenness; (2) the demonization of a different race/people as the enemy of the chosen; (3) the response to the chosen's past and present social conditions; (4) the production of millennial aspirations. These functions serve

46. Lee, *Millenarian Movement*, 64–70.

as potential inspiration for the various political manifestations of the NOI and Christian Identity movement, but do not dictate the shape or nature of such manifestation. The hidden identities purported in both mythologies make explicit claims of chosenness, denoting an elevated spiritual proximity to God/Allah. Identity Christians, beginning with their British-Israelist forbearers, replaced the biblical Jews with themselves as God's chosen people, thus giving themselves a privileged status while relying on the same written sources for religious authority. The NOI's theology, however, relies largely on its own mythology, although Muhammad was quick to justify its inferences using the authority of biblical and Qur'anic passages.⁴⁷ Despite the inventiveness of Muhammad's racialized account of creation and its inconsistency with the Qur'an, Muhammad and his converts saw themselves as Muslims, and incorporated a surprising amount of traditions from Sunni Islam.⁴⁸

The mythologies of Christian Identity and the NOI also identify an adversary to the chosen people, who often, due to their satanic paternity, are fated to perpetual conflict with the chosen until the coming of a Black or White millennium. Race becomes a metric of ethical fortitude, creating a biologically essentialist conception of morality. The NOI's cosmology exemplifies this pattern more explicitly than Christian Identity's, as Yakub's selective breeding illustrated a direct correlation between lack of skin pigmentation and moral depravity. In the NOI's sacred history, the introduction of

47. Lee, *Millenarian Movement*, 46.

48. Curtis IV, *Black Muslim Religion*, 10–14.

Whiteness coincides with the introduction of social unrest and oppression. The myth of Yakub depicts White people as corrupt and irredeemable sowers of discord and identifies them as the objects of Allah’s judgment.⁴⁹ Muhammad phrases his view of Whites with succinct clarity, “[t]he white race is not, and never will be, the chosen people of Allah (God). They are the chosen people of their father Yakub, the devil.”⁵⁰ There is no hope for brotherhood between the White and Black races, as they are ontologically adversarial: “One is created an enemy against the other, and since the righteous are more powerful than the wicked, Allah, the God of righteousness set a time of reckoning for the enemy (the white man) of the righteous.”⁵¹

The modern site of religious struggle is the Black effort to convert and unify under Islam and White efforts to prevent them. Through Islam, there exists a facilitator of transnational brotherhood among nonwhites. To Muhammad, “[Islam] is the only unifying religion known and tried by the races and nations of the earth,” adding, “[t]his the white race knows.”⁵² Their knowledge of this explains their vilification of Islam, as they hope to retain their earthly domination through a spiritual and political division of nonwhites. For believers, the NOI’s identification of Whites as devils speaks to the social reality of

49. Lee, *Millenarian Movement*, 40–41.

50. Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America* (Phoenix: Secretarius MEMPS, 2011), Apple Books, 373, ch. 62. As the page numbers between the electronic and print versions vary considerably, all references to this work will include chapter numbers to help readers of the print book locate the quotations referenced.

51. Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman*, 717, ch. 120.

52. Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman*, 367, ch. 61.

their oppression as Blacks under White supremacy in America. It also gives theological justification to feelings of social isolation in a world that was eighty-five percent nonwhite. As with most theological matters in Identity Christianity, there is much variation in the emphasis, nature, and clarity they give to their identification of Jews as the cosmic enemy of White northern Europeans. As James Aho notes, Christian Identity does not agree on a single definition of “Jew,” and many do not consider Jewish identity to pertain to race or ethnicity at all, but rather just adherence to a specific creed.⁵³ Despite Aho’s problematizing of Christian Identity’s usage of the word “Jew,” he alleges its usage in Identity historiography identifies Jews as the architects of world history, who seek to oppress the White race through their power in government, economics, and media.⁵⁴ The identification of the Jews as an ontological adversary to White people forms the basis of Identity theology’s dualism, aiding in the perception of their own positionality within God’s holy army.⁵⁵

With the articulation of a revelation of a hidden racial identity indicative of divine chosenness – an identity which has an ontological opposite in a race of satanic paternity – the NOI and Christian Identity’s racialized theologies set up a framework for believers to explain real and perceived sites of oppression. Within these frameworks, any potential social or personal ill is sourced back to the root of all evil – i.e., Jews for Christian Identity, and Whites for the NOI – providing sites

53. Aho, *Politics of Righteousness*, 92–93.

54. Aho, *Politics of Righteousness*, 264–265.

55. Davis, *Phinehas Priesthood*, 25.

of injustice with extra-historical meanings beyond their social ramifications. The power of Muhammad's creation mythology resides in its construction of a Black theodicy, which acknowledged the lived experience of Black Americans to a greater degree than Black Protestant denominations.⁵⁶ As Edward E. Curtis explains, Elijah Muhammad offered

a story grounded in a mythological view of history that explained the fall of black civilization, the Middle Passage from Africa to the Americas, and the practice of Christian religion among slaves and their descendants. This narrative assured African Americans that they were good by nature and had been the victims of an evil plot. While blacks may have been powerless to prevent the unfolding of this history, Elijah Muhammad said that God had not abandoned them. It was their destiny as the chosen race, the original man, to be offered salvation, to regain this former status as rulers of the earth.⁵⁷

Muhammad's story resonated with disheartened African Americans in the industrial Northeast and Midwest, many of whom had moved from the South during the Great Migration to escape racial violence and find better employment. His narrative not only provides an explanation for the history of genocide and slavery, but also a reason for why White America continues their legacy of racial violence and austerity.⁵⁸ In *Message to the Blackman in America*, Muhammad often cites

56. Curtis IV, *Black Muslim Religion*, 11.

57. Curtis IV, *Black Muslim Religion*, 11.

58. Gibson, *History of the Nation*, 14–15.

Whites' natural propensity for discord, claiming that Whites cannot even keep peace amongst themselves. The theology of the NOI responded to its social context by offering the hope that one day racial power structures would invert, and Allah would administer racial and economic justice for the crimes White Americans continue to inflict on African Americans.⁵⁹

Unlike the NOI's theology, Christian Identity does not have to provide a racial theodicy to explain divine chosenness within the context of an oppressive social history. White Americans already occupy the privileged location of America's racial hierarchy, and Identity theology serves to (re)affirm the spiritual and political power of this location against those who question or attempt to subvert White supremacy. However, the privileged status of Whiteness does not comprehensively protect White Americans from other forms of social distress – specifically, economic distress. The economic impacts of globalization have disproportionately affected the rural working-class White men that make up the bulk of Christian Identity's demographics. From the mid-twentieth century onward, the corporatization of farming under multinational food suppliers and the squeezing out of small businesses in the emerging “Walmart economy” disrupted the livelihoods of Christian Identity's base. An invisible enemy stripped away what Identity Christians believed to be their birthright: private land ownership.⁶⁰ Many Christian Identity figures characterize this process as the operation of satanic or

59. Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman*, 618, ch. 104.

60. Michael Kimmel, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* (New York: Nations Books, 2013), 244–248.

“Babylonian” economics built on usury, and take this as evidence of a global Jewish banking conspiracy.⁶¹ The connection of modern economic practices to scriptural Babylonian economics is no accident within the context of Identity’s mythology. Given the eternal nature of the divine conflict, it follows that “ungodly” economic abuses would have biblical antecedents, and that the same party would impose these abuses throughout history. Rural White farmers, burdened by the farm crisis of the 1980s, saw the parasitism of a worldwide banking conspiracy as a suitable explanation for their economic woes.⁶² Christian Identity’s fixation on the evils of debt and interest stood out from other far-right Christian groups’ typical defense of the economic status quo.⁶³

Beyond responses to socio-economic conditions, the NOI and Christian Identity offer curiously akin responses to specific subjects of twentieth century gender politics, such as birth control and abortion. Both movements cite the progression of gender politics as indication of a genocidal conspiracy against their race. Muhammad, who previously made little comment on women’s issues, characterized birth control in *Message to the Blackman in America* as a plot by Whites to eliminate the Black race in a fashion reminiscent of Yakub’s creation of the White race.⁶⁴ Genocidal conspiracy theories related to birth control became a consistent feature of

61. Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 204–205.

62. Churchill, *In the Tyrant’s Face*, 179.

63. Zeskind, *The “Christian Identity” Movement*, 41.

64. Berg, *Elijah Muhammad*, 93. In *Message to the Blackman*, Muhammad directly connects American birth control with Yakub. See 201–202, ch. 35.

the NOI's chief publication, *Muhammad Speaks*, in the 1960s and early 1970s.⁶⁵ Likewise, birth control is held to be facilitator of "white genocide" in Christian Identity thought. After *Roe v. Wade*, however, birth control took a discursive backseat to abortion in its significance to the genocidal campaign against the White race. Identity groups – such as The Order and the Church of Israel – emphasize abortion as essential to ZOG's goal of White racial and cultural extermination, and, for many Identity believers, the legalization of abortion confirms the idea that Jewish genocidal efforts materialized through governmental policies.⁶⁶

The NOI and Christianity Identity's conspiratorial responses to changing social conditions irrevocably tie into the millennialist ideologies present in both movements. While the chosen's degree of agency in grappling with the approaching millennium varies between the two, the belief in a millenarian end to a racialized cosmic conflict produces similar aspirations in both groups.⁶⁷ These aspirations carry myth and doctrine

65. Lee, *Millenarian Movement*, 61–67.

66. Abby Ferber, *White Man Falling: Race, Gender, and White Supremacy* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 120–122. Ferber notes elsewhere the degree to which the entertainment industry contributes to Jewish conspiracy as a conveyor of acceptable social practice. For additional information about the Order, the Church of Israel, and other Christian Identity groups that have emphasized abortion as a part of "white genocide," see Leonard Zeskind, *Blood and Politics: The History of the White Nationalist Movement from the Margins to the Mainstream* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009).

67. While the NOI and Identity Christians see some role for themselves in the coming millennium, this role does not formulate a direct cause and

across the threshold from individual belief to political action, and lead to the production of a separatist political ideology that aims to prepare the chosen for the imminent millennium. The differences in the political action these aspirations produce serve to contextualize the socio-economic position of both groups' adherents and widen the relational understanding of the role of both movements' myths and doctrines in their adherents' social lives.

Both Christian Identity and the NOI propose separatism as their core millennialist aspiration, a social yearning consistent with their divinized beliefs in racial purity. This separatist aspiration functions in a similar manner for both groups: as a means of both protection and preparation. As previously stated, Muhammad had little evidence to believe the reconciliation and betterment of race relations between White and Black Americans was even a remote possibility. Some NOI members proselytized Islam as a protection against racism, with racial separation being the principal guarantee. NOI conversion narratives echoed this idea of protection, often highlighting themes of escape from the various evils the NOI attributed to White society.⁶⁸ However, even if material justifications did not serve as a proper explanation for the necessity of separatism, Muhammad's description of Judgment Day and the Fall of America most certainly did. Adherents had to prepare for the approaching Black millennium lest they find themselves without a nation, community, or even identity.

effect relationship between human agency and divine products. In other words, millennial agency ultimately resides with God/Allah.

68. Curtis, *Black Muslim Religion*, 24–29.

Muhammad advocated self-sufficiency largely because he perceived African Americans as “dependent on the slave-master.”⁶⁹ Particularly, he saw Black economics as dependent on Whites, as they manufacture and produce “everything.”⁷⁰ However, the NOI's primary form of millennialist preparation is entangled with the first of the aforementioned functions of their theology: the revelation of a chosen identity. Education was therefore the primary political project of the NOI, as evidenced by Fard's founding of the University of Islam.

Despite all of the NOI's separatist rhetoric, the only active separation Muhammad and his followers practiced already existed within the environment they were located. Muhammad asked for land and support from the U.S. government but never seriously drew up plans for this separate society. Muhammad's son Wallace confirmed in 1980 that Muhammad knew his demands would never be met; regardless, the request for a separate state would serve as effective motivation for his audience.⁷¹ The millennialism manifest within the NOI's practice stopped well short of political mass movement, and referred strongly to a personal code of the ethics – a moral separation from Whiteness. The socio-political position of African Americans prohibited any realistic political action in Muhammad and the NOI forming their own country, no matter the size of the movement or the sincerity of their religious convictions. This realization makes

69. Curtis, *Black Muslim Religion*, 110. This is a major motif in *Message to the Blackman* and can be found throughout the text.

70. Curtis, *Black Muslim Religion*, 437.

71. Lee, *Millenarian Movement*, 90.

doctrinal emphasis on political separation insignificant in comparison to education on religious and behavioral issues. The relative political inaction accompanying the NOI's separatist ideology juxtaposes strongly with Christian Identity's various political expressions. Both refer back to the same millennialist separatist instinct, but Christian Identity takes a more active role in turning its separatist aspirations into a reality. Multiple groups with strong Identity ties attempted to establish their own sovereign territory and protect it through violent means. Perhaps the most militarized of these groups, James Ellison's The Covenant, The Sword and the Arm of the Lord (CSA), established a 224-acre community in the Ozarks of northern Arkansas, called Zarephath-Horeb, in 1976.⁷² The original goal of their separatism was to provide the means of protection necessary to survive the imminent Tribulation, but the CSA grew increasingly more antagonistic over time, seeing themselves at war with the outside world.

However, organized Christian Identity communities like Zarephath-Horeb have not – historically or contemporarily – acted as the primary vehicles of right-wing militancy and violence. Rather, violence emanating from these communities tends to come from militias, terrorist cells, and “lone wolf” actors. Terrorist groups with heavy Christian Identity ties – such as the Phinehas Priesthood, Posse Comitatus, and The Order – have focused on waging an active war against the U.S. government, accompanied with similar schemata. All three groups also claim that their existence is legitimated by the

72. Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 216.

incongruity between the United States law and their interpretation of God's law. The militant political expressions of the aforementioned terrorist groups refer to an important theological context of Christian Identity's millennialism. Many Identity Christians deny the presence of a rapture of righteous Christians and promote the idea that the world has already entered the apocalypse.⁷³ This theological position orients the protective necessity of survivalist and separatist political ideologies for Ellison's CSA, and also helps explain how and why God's chosen suffer under their present economic and political positions.

It would be ahistorical to claim that the theology of British-Israelism that fostered Christian Identity necessitated the extremism of ardent adherents like James Ellison of the CSA. Adherents such as Ellison are recent examples of a biblical interpretation dating back to the late eighteenth century; however, the racism and justifications for extrajudicial action interwoven within Christian Identity's ideology predate their extremist political manifestations of the late twentieth century. It would be a mistake to label the progression of Christian Identity as an *ex post facto* excuse for political violence. Ultimately, it is this violence which brought Christian Identity to the attention of federal authorities and the American public. There is absolutely no equivalent in the history of the NOI. Despite the labeling of Whites as satanic, it was not for the NOI or its adherents to exact justice against their oppressors; that was God's prerogative. For all the

73. Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 213.

labeling of the NOI – and specifically Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X – as violent and requiring government surveillance and infiltration, the NOI exercised its political strength via solidarity, not violence. This discrepancy between the NOI and Christian Identity is more than curious. If their respective theologies are so instrumental to their political expressions, why would one sanction violence and the other not? How could similar forms of millennialist thought inspire dissimilar millennialist action?

Violent action relies on more than the beliefs and motivations of the actor; far more so, it relies on the actor's agency within their political reality. Violence also relies on the tools available to the actor. As Hannah Arendt wrote in *On Violence*, “[v]iolence is by nature instrumental.”⁷⁴ And indeed, the instruments at the disposal of the NOI and Christian Identity reflect the dissimilarity in violence: rural Identity Christians have greater access to weapons and bomb making materials – specifically the ammonium nitrate commonly found in fertilizer – than the urban believers of the NOI. However, the answer to the discrepancy in violence is not a matter of pure instrumentality.⁷⁵ Violence connotes a relationship, which supplies it with a persistent political element. Moreover, the political power of the actors directs the possibility and structure of their violence. To quote Arendt

74. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1970), 51.

75. Weapons and explosives laws are also much looser in sparsely populated areas, allowing binary explosives – such as Tannerite – to be available for purchase at gun shows to use on private property without the interference of city ordinances.

further, “politically speaking, it is insufficient to say that power and violence are not the same. Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power’s disappearance.”⁷⁶ Violence is not necessary when power is total; violence becomes a substitution for power when power struggles to maintain itself. The prevalence of violence amongst Identity Christians would suggest a reduction of their political power, or at least a widespread impression of that reduction. It would also explain their positioning as victims of and resisters to a growing satanic governmental force (i.e. ZOG).

Identity Christians in the rural United States certainly had reasons to feel a reduction of their power. While the criminality of many Identity groups was at its peak, rural America was suffering through a farm crisis that often saw the price of their commodities fall below their cost of production. Zeskind recalls in connection to the formulation of the Posse Comitatus, “[b]etween 1982 and 1985 the market value of farm acreage fell by an astonishing \$146 billion, an amount equal to the combined assets of IBM, General Electric, Dow Chemical, and several other major corporations at that time... Approximately 625,000 family farm operations were lost between 1981 and 1988.”⁷⁷ Intersecting the agronomic crisis with the changing social landscape in the decades preceding it, it was not a stretch to stress the threat of feminism, cosmopolitanism, and the growing acceptance of interracial

76. Arendt, *On Violence*, 56.

77. Zeskind, *Blood and Politics*, 73.

relationships to a group constituted principally of rural White farmers, who for decades were able to live and espouse regressive racial and gender politics. Changes in immigrant classification and preference under the quota system after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 brought a greater number of Asian immigrants to the Western United States. The elimination of the Bracero Program in 1964 also unintentionally increased undocumented immigration from Latin America.⁷⁸ These socio-economic factors do not create cause-effect relationships on the beliefs of Identity Christians and how they express those beliefs politically, but they do provide a context of power in which those expressions take place. Millenarian Identity believers could point to any of these factors as evidence of ZOG's growing prevalence and the initiation of the end times. Even mainstream political and media narratives describe shifting views on traditional gender roles as an effeminization of society, and changes in immigration and U.S. demographics as a "crisis" or an "invasion."⁷⁹

Northern urban Blacks, regardless of whether they were native northerners or migrants from the south, never

78. Douglas S. Massey and Karen A. Pren, "Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Policy: Explaining the Post-1965 Surge from Latin America," *Population and Development Review* 38, no. 1 (March 2012): 1–5. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 actually had little effect on immigration from Central and South America, as "before 1965 there were no numerical limits at all on immigration from Latin America or the Caribbean, only qualitative restrictions" (Massey and Pren, "Unintended Consequences," 1).

79. Massey and Pren, "Unintended Consequences," 7.

possessed the social and political power Whites in the city or country enjoyed. Members of the NOI did not concern themselves with holding fast to the little power they already had, but rather with constructing new assemblies of power. The reclamation of a hidden identity allows for a new structure of power to emerge, located in the solidarity of a geographically and politically concentrated religious movement. The solidarity and concentration provided physical safety as well as a spiritual and psychological protection from layers of social oppression within American society. The racialism of NOI theology provides an explanation for a racially defined social position that is analogous to Christian Identity, but the NOI's description of their oppression is not a matter of pure perception or a product of a devolving political position. Unlike Identity's interpretations of interracial sex, abortion, and eugenics as a conspiracy to corrupt or destroy the White race, Muhammad's concerns over eugenics, especially in the form of compulsory sterilization that he mentioned in *Message to the Blackman*, were based in verifiable experience. In the state of North Carolina alone, a reported five thousand of the 7,686 state-sanctioned sterilizations performed were performed on African Americans.⁸⁰ (While North Carolina concedes only thirty-eight percent of the 7,686 as African American, they acknowledge a disturbing ninety percent acceptance rate of petitions for compulsory sterilization.⁸¹

80. Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 217.

81. NC General Assembly (18 Dec 2008), *House Select Committee on the Compensation for Victims of the Eugenics Sterilization Program*, 11.

Conclusion

The effort to compare and evaluate the theologies of the NOI and Christian Identity cannot rest solely on the comparison and evaluation of morphological commonalities or analogous rhetoric and motifs. While these similarities are certainly intriguing, they simply do not capture the full picture. However, when these theologies are measured within the scope of their disparate political realities, the activations and movements of power that inform and motivate them become clearer, and this, in turn, can help scholars of religion come to a better understanding of the relationship between ardent religious conviction and political action. Within the review of power within the NOI and Christian Identity, we find a possible reason as to why the NOI was largely peaceful and law-abiding, despite its use of conventionally vitriolic language in its racialized theology and its customary implementation of millenarian ideas. In turn, we also see a possible explanation for the permissiveness of violence within Christian Identity, as White Christians enjoy a social license that affords them the privilege to espouse, threaten, and enact violence on theological biases with the expectation of desirable ends. The gradual diminishment of White supremacy's power provides the underlying context in which Identity Christians can (and feel 'called' to) justify acts of violence and terrorism.