

Black Rabbi Symbolizes Guy

By Fred Barbash

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GEORGETOWN, Guyana, Nov. 29—In Cleveland, Ohio, it was just plain David Hill, a one-time felon and little-noted fugitive from justice who fled the country without pursuit.

Here in Guyana, he is the Rabbi Edward Emmanuel Washington, head of "The Nation of Israel," who claims to be "the only true spiritual leader on earth." He is a man surrounded by dozens of uniformed Guyanese believers who listen in awe to his every word.

By his own estimates, Washington has more than 8,000 followers, all black and all but a handful Guyanese by birth. Others here guess that the number is closer to 400, including a small number of American-born blacks.

Washington's organization has no connection with the state of Israel or with those conventionally thought of as Jews. His followers, he says, are indeed the only true Jews. His line is unabashedly antiwhite.

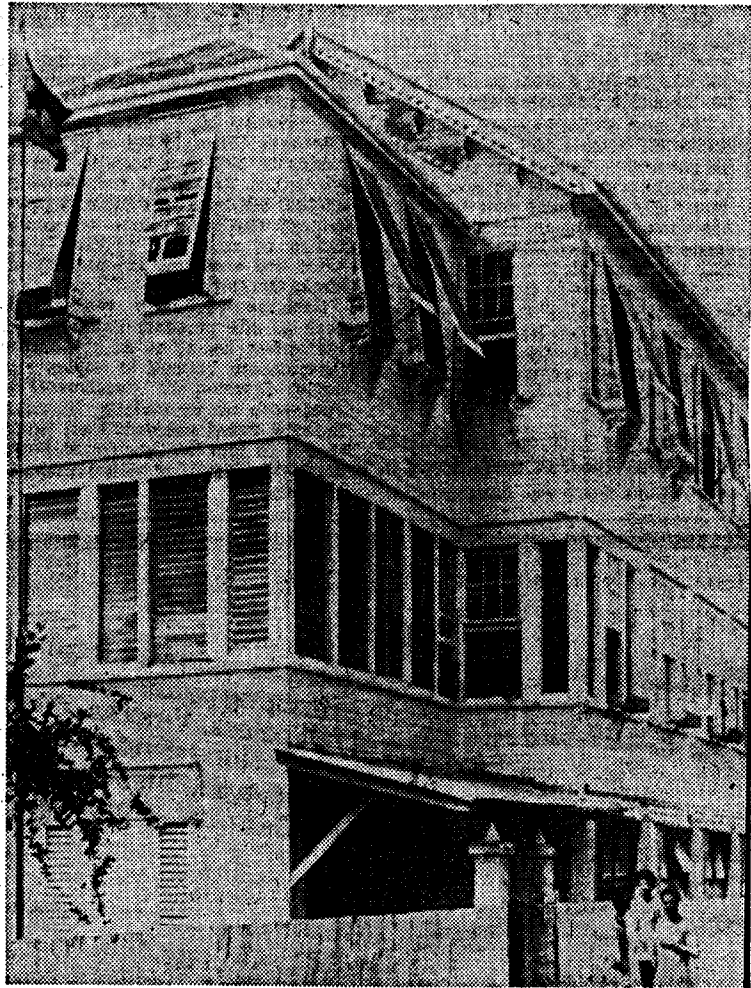
Like Peoples Temple leader Jim Jones, Washington has been welcomed here. And like the Peoples Temple, his group provides small services to the ruling Peoples National Congress in return. They show up at progovernment political rallies, demonstrate in favor of government-sponsored bills in Parliament and on occasion have helped to disrupt opposition party political gatherings.

But imports are not necessary to perform such tasks here and the reason such cults are accepted is more complex.

They are a complicated mix of ideology, ethnic politics, internal political expediency and international image, according to experienced observers of Guyana. And in some instances, the question that has confronted the government is not so much whether they want such groups here, as what it believes it would look like should it turn them away.

The arrival of "Rabbi" Washington about three years ago is illustrative. It came at a time of rising black awareness throughout the Caribbean, when blacks in islands just to the north of this developing South American nation were asserting themselves forcefully, often with accompanying racial strife.

"What would it have looked like if



The House of Israel, left, in Georgetown, Guyana, is home to the followers

[black Prime Minister] Forbes Burnham had turned away a black organization that claimed to be alienated from a racist society in America?" one source close to the government asked. Tr for add three

"No one in this government has any special love for this man who goes by the name of Rabbi Washington. They probably didn't even know who he was."

Political observers say it also did no harm to Burnham's internal political needs. His political party is largely black in a multi-ethnic system where the parties have tended to be formed along racial lines—blacks, East Indians, Portuguese, and Chinese.

"The question you should be asking," said the source, "is not why we let them in but why shouldn't we let them in. This bunch doesn't do Burn-

Guyana's Attitude Toward Cults



Associated Press

of the "Rabbi" Edward Emmanuel Washington, right, shown with his family.

ham a tremendous amount of good but they don't do him any harm either."

The Peoples Temple matter is much more involved. The Rev. Jim Jones claimed to be building a socialist society, goals in conformity with Burnham's socialist ideology. That is how the government has officially explained the welcome the group received here.

The government also says the Peoples Temple's plan to build vast agricultural cooperatives was another reason for admitting them. Washington also has been given a much smaller plot of land—about 150 acres—which he says he is using to produce cash crops.

The People Temple also brought wealth with them as an added incentive, not only money but electrical

generators, elaborate medical equipment, farm machinery and radio communications gear. In a country where foreign exchange is in extremely short supply and especially in the relatively unpopulated Guyanese interior, where Jones settled, such goods are a scarce commodity.

Several observers here also believe that Guyana's continuing border dispute with neighboring Venezuela also helped sell Jonestown to the government. Jones settled his people right smack in the area that has been contested.

"It's like the Gaza Strip or the West Bank," said one diplomat here. "If you put people there, it looks like the territory is yours. Your claim is staked."

"And if those people happen to be Americans, you've got a trip wire there. Anybody who attacks would be attacking American citizens. Jones hoped to put as many as 10,000 Americans into Jonestown eventually."

With a few exceptions, the presence of these cults—along with much smaller branches of the Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church, the Black Muslims, and an obscure group of black "Israelites" from Brooklyn—has caused little concern among the numerous established churches in Guyana. Many young Guyanese—particularly males—follow the Jamaican-inspired Rastafarian cult, which worships the late Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie.

"The big ones don't usually curse the small ones though the little ones thrive on cursing the big ones," said Paul Peraud, a veteran journalist here.

There have been several instances in which that was reversed, however. On one occasion, Peoples Temple leaders convinced Catholic clergy here to allow them to conduct what was to be an ecumenical service in a cathedral.

But the priests were aghast when midway through the rite, the cultists launched into a bombastic crusade on behalf of healing.

The incident caused a serious split to develop between the Guyana Council of Churches, which had been receptive to the temple, and the Temple leadership, according to the Rev. Andrew Morrison, of the council.