

Chenault's Road to Atlanta and Tragedy

By PAUL DELANEY
Special to The New York Times

DAYTON, Ohio, July 7 — A week after a young black man sattered the quiet of a church service in Atlanta by killing Mrs. Martin Luther King Sr. and a deacon, the nagging question of motive persists.

The answer appears to lie somewhere in a tangled religious philosophy that Marcus Wayne Chenault embraced, a philosophy that justified the violent act of a confused, complex 23-year-old Ohio State University student.

For Marcus Wayne Chenault had apparently decided 15 months ago that black ministers were a menace to black people and should be killed.

In April of 1973, a month after he met Hananiah E. Israel, whose bizarre theology would change his life, Mr. Chenault planned to kill the Rev. Howard B. Washington, a distant cousin, while on a week's visit at the home of the minister in Akron, Ohio.

Not Taken Seriously

Another black minister in Akron, the Rev. Billy Robinson, recalls hearing of the idea from Mr. Chenault. Mr. Robinson told Mr. Washington, but neither man took it seriously, and neither can explain why Mr. Chenault did not attempt the assassination.

Last month, the Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, president of Operation People United to Save Humanity, a civil rights organization, apparently was a target. The police in Columbus, Ohio, found in Mr. Chenault's apartment an unused bus ticket to Chicago, where Mr. Jackson lives. Written on the ticket was, "Father's Day massacre canceled." The police also found a "death list" of 10 black ministers. Mr. Jackson's name was first on the list.

Two Saturdays later, on June 29, Mr. Chenault bought another bus ticket, this time to Atlanta, and this time there was no cancellation. The target was the Rev. Martin Luther King Sr., the father of the civil rights leader who was assassinated six years ago.

Instead, Mrs. Alberta Williams King, the wife of the elderly pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, where the shooting took place, was killed, along with a deacon. A woman parishioner was wounded.

Mr. Chenault, waving two pistols, was subdued and arrested and is being held in the Fulton County Jail without bond.

His lawyer, Randy Bacote, said yesterday Mr. Chenault had told him that he was "satisfied" with the results of the shooting, that he had "partially accomplished" his mission. Mr. Chenault's primary target, Mr. Bacote said, had been Mr. King.

MONDAY, JULY 8, 1974

Paved by Bizarre Interpretation

'The Real Truth'

Apparently, Mr. Chenault's exposure to the philosophy of Mr. Israel was crucial. Mr. Israel, a 70-year-old recluse and self-taught theologian who lives in a two-room apartment in the predominantly black Avondale section of Cincinnati, set out to persuade a small group of young blacks that black ministers were the enemy of black people, getting rich off the community. This, the young men were told, was the real "truth."

A 'Lost Tribe'

Mr. Israel taught that blacks were a lost tribe of Israelites enslaved by whites and misled by the Christian teachings of black ministers, that only the death of all black ministers would make blacks free.

The pudgy, round-faced Mr. Chenault ultimately drew up his "death list," which included, in the words of Mr. Chenault, "the dreaming King family," an apparent reference to the "I have a dream" speech of Dr. King at the civil rights March in Washington in 1963.

Other members of the group explained in interviews that when Mr. Chenault killed Mrs. King, he was carrying out an order of the "Most High," or God. Walter E. Brooks, a tall, thin former schoolmate of Mr. Chenault at Ohio State, became the pupil of Mr. Chenault and is now teaching the "truth" to several other young men in Dayton.

According to the philosophy, Mr. Chenault was not responsible for the death of Mrs. King because the act was not

of Bible

his choice, but was preordained 2,000 years ago, as was everything that happens today.

Mr. Brooks said that Mr. Chenault's task was incomplete because "there were 10 names on that list." He said it was the will of the "most high" that the task be completed, and that "agents of the most high" would be called upon to do it.

'Marked' Men

"He uses his children to do his work," Mr. Brooks remarked. "Every man with 'reverend' in front of his name is in trouble. God is going to kill them all. They are already marked. It was planned 2,000 years ago.

"But we are nonviolent. We are the most peaceful people on earth."

It was this kind of philosophy that put Marcus Wayne Chenault on the road to Atlanta and tragedy.

From interviews with scores of relatives, friends, schoolmates and neighbors, a picture emerges of an energetic, but troubled, young man.

On the one hand, he seemed to enjoy the life of an Ohio State University student: football and basketball games, hanging out in the student union, going to parties. Outwardly, he was witty and charming.

But there was another side to Mr. Chenault that seemed to tear at him, a side that made some fellow students find him antagonistic and obnoxious.

In the Ohio State University world of bigness—sprawling campus, large stadium, huge athletes—Mr. Chenault was sensitive about his small 5-foot-3-inch frame. He had trouble dating. He went to parties, but no one can recall ever seeing him dance. He smoked pot and drank wine. He was no athlete. He missed making the fraternity of his choice.

So Marcus Chenault, with his solid Christian upbringing and a strong knowledge of the bible, searched for meaning through religion.



The Cincinnati Post
Hananiah E. Israel at his home in Cincinnati.

'Death List' Found In Chenault's Room

Special to The New York Times

DAYTON, Ohio, July 7—The Columbus police found a sheet of paper in Marcus Wayne Chenault's room here with the title "Death List."

The list consisted of the following 10 names:

The Rev. Jesse Jackson of Chicago; the Rev. Hosea Williams, president of the Atlanta Southern Christian Leadership Conference; the "Dreaming King Family," a reference to the family of the Rev. Martin Luther King Sr.; the Rev. Cecil Williams, pastor of the Glide Memorial Church, San Francisco; the Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Atlanta.

Also, the Rev. James Cleveland of Los Angeles; the Rev. "Queen" Franklin, possibly referring to the Rev. C. L. Franklin of Detroit; the Rev. Frederick Eikenkrötter, New York evangelist also known as "Reverend Ike"; the Rev. Howard B. Washington of Akron, Ohio, and Father Divine, the late evangelist.

'A Little Weird'

"We always thought he was a little weird as a freshman, but there were a lot of weirdos on campus," remarked Carol Peters, who said she and a girlfriend ate lunch with Mr. Chenault soon after he came to Ohio State in 1969.

"He was loud and he would say weird things to get attention. He said he once killed some little kittens he had by flushing them down a toilet. Soon, we started avoiding him."

More and more, students began to avoid him when they found his conversation irrelevant, especially when he started on the subject that he knew best, the Bible. He did this even at parties.

"And a party was no place to talk about the Bible, but he did and people were turned off by it," Miss Peters recalled.

Mr. Chenault once told a student, "The only way a little guy can get any attention is to go out and shoot someone."

His intense interest in the Bible resulted from the deep religious background of his family. He was the youngest of three children of Mr. and Mrs. Marcus H. Chenault. Young Marcus spent the first 17 years of his life in Winchester, Ky., a small town near Lexington, where Sunday school, the regular worship service and B.T.U. (Baptist Training Union) were a part of every Sunday.

A fairly bright youth, Wayne,

How to get home delivery of The Times

The New York Times

Home Delivery Department
Times Square, N.Y. 10036

Please arrange to have
The New York Times
delivered to my home as
checked:

- Every morning
 Weekdays Sundays

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State & Zip _____

Apt., (if any) _____ Phone _____

Home delivery is available through
independent route dealers for an
extra service charge in most parts
of the New York metropolitan area
and in major cities throughout the U.S.

as the family called him, displayed a keen interest in the Bible and would discuss it often with his mother, discussions she enjoyed until he met Mr. Israel.

A Move to Dayton

In 1968, the family moved to Dayton, where Marcus completed his last year of high school, graduating from Roth High in 1969. He enrolled at Ohio State, originally as a pre-law student, but he switched to education.

He became interested in the Hebrew Pentecostal Church of the Living God, made up of small congregations sprinkled across the country.

The sect believes that blacks descended from a tribe of Israelites and were therefore black Hebrews, not Negroes.

Then Mr. Chenault heard of Mr. Israel and met the old man in Cincinnati in March, 1973. The student made several trips to see Mr. Israel, taking Mr. Brooks and other friends with him to discover the "truth."

Often the session was taped so that Mr. Chenault could take the tapes back to Columbus to study them. He made numerous phone calls to Mr. Israel to continue the discussions or ask for interpretations.

The "truth" was a curious, literal interpretation of the Old Testament. Whatever the problem, the answer was to be

found in the Old Testament, as interpreted by Mr. Israel. Mr. Israel taught Mr. Chenault that the problems of blacks were traceable to false prophets, ministers and civil rights leaders.

For example, Mr. Israel counseled that black ministers had deceived black people, and Zachariah, xiii, 3, declares, "And it shall come to pass, that when any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live."

'The First to Kill'

Mr. Israel told Mr. Chenault, in a tape-recorded interpretation, that the verse meant that when God established a black kingdom, some of the false prophets, the ministers, would sneak back in, but "both father and mother will be the first to kill them because they will not want to go through the hell we've been living in for 400 years."

Mr. Chenault tested his new philosophy on friends and family. Most of them rejected it outright and never took seriously his threats against black ministers.

Mr. Chenault met the most significant resistance at home. When he explained his new interpretations of the Bible to his mother, she said she did not know how to answer him.



Associated Press

Marcus Wayne Chenault on July 1, after his arrest.

She eventually refused to discuss religion with him.

Mr. Chenault's father finally threatened to cut off his son's school allowance if the youth persisted in such beliefs. Mr. Chenault began seeing less of his family, either remaining in Columbus or staying with Mr. Brooks when he came to Dayton.

He dropped several courses and then left school last December. A university spokes-

man said that Mr. Chenault was not in scholastic trouble, and friends assumed he had done so to devote more time to his religion.

However, he stayed close to the university. He took odd jobs around the campus area and seemed to remain joyful and fun-loving.

"He went to parties, still smoked and drank a little and he didn't consider that hypocritical," one student said. "But he still turned everybody off with that weird religious stuff."

Not a Demonstrator

"We thought it was strange because religion wasn't what black kids on campus were into. And Marcus wasn't into demonstrations and black organizations. He was always around, but he wasn't active. He pledged Omega Psi Phi fraternity, but he just didn't fit in there and dropped out."

Mr. Chenault had no steady girl friends as far as anyone on campus knew.

"He tried occasionally, but although he was a nice dude, he just didn't appeal to any of us," one girl said.

Mr. Chenault was arrested by the Columbus police last April on a disorderly conduct charge after putting the speakers of his record player in a window and playing them loudly.

By then, Mr. Chenault had changed his name on his mailbox to "Jacob" and had put a sign on his door, "Servant Jacob." His apartment was on the second floor of an old three-story brick house two blocks from campus. He painted his rooms black, with yellow dots. There was nothing out of the ordinary about Mr. Chenault's behavior the week before the killing of Mrs. King, friends and neighbors said. He played sandlot basketball as usual, and went to parties on Monday and Tuesday of that week.

"He had a good time, got high and went into the religion thing and then people ignored him," one girl said.

He told friends that he was going to Atlanta "to meet destiny," but that was shrugged off.

On Thursday, a young Black Muslim saw him and inquired whether he still wanted her to get a ticket for him to hear Minister Louis Farrakhan of the New York Mosque, who was speaking the next night in Columbus. He said yes.

At the Bus Station

But on Friday, a student from Cincinnati, a Seventh-day Adventist, saw him at the bus station.

"Are you still into that same

old thing?" Mr. Chenault asked.

When she replied yes, he said "Okay" and walked away.

He took a bus to Dayton and checked into the Downtown Holiday Inn, a block from the bus station. Hotel employees later reported that they had heard more than one voice in his room. Mr. Brooks said he had not visited Mr. Chenault and did not know who might have.

Mr. Chenault went to his family's home and borrowed the car. During the night, the home was broken into and his father's two pistols were taken. The father reported the break-in to the police Saturday morning. On Sunday morning the guns were used to kill Mrs. King and the deacon.

A bellman at the hotel said he had taken food from room 813, registered to Marcus Chenault, but that the man who took the order at the door was not Mr. Chenault.

At about 5 P.M. Saturday, Mr. Chenault bought a bus ticket for Atlanta. He boarded the bus at 6:30 P.M. for the all-night ride to the place once called by its residents, "the city too busy to hate." Mr. Chenault was on his way "to meet destiny."