

A COMPANION VOLUME · NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS, 1886–2026

Visions of Deliverance

*Every generation produced someone who promised a way out —
a new identity, a new homeland, a new god. This is the record of
who they were, what they built, and what it cost.*

Fourteen Movements · Generations 11 Through 16

A NOTE ON TERMS

Before the Profiles

These movements are organized by the generation (per the 1619–2026 framework) in which they were founded. Each profile covers the founder's claimed vision, the movement's peak documented membership, its real accomplishments, and where it fell short or caused harm — without editorializing about whether any given movement's theology is true. That is a question of faith, not history.

A pattern worth naming plainly: nearly every movement here promised the same core thing — that Black Americans were not who white America said they were, but something far greater (a lost tribe of Israel, a Moorish nation, the original Asiatic people, God in human form) — and nearly every one of them also produced real harm: financial exploitation, violence, or both. Holding both facts at once, rather than picking one, is the point of this document.

GENERATION 11 · 1869-1894

Church of the Living God, the Pillar Ground of Truth

Frank S. Cherry · founded 1886, Chattanooga, TN

VISION	Cherry claimed a personal revelation that God told him African Americans were the true descendants of the Hebrews of the Bible; he also taught that Adam, Eve, and Jesus were Black.
PEAK MEMBERSHIP	Small and largely local to Chattanooga; precise figures were never recorded.
WHAT IT BUILT	One of the two founding congregations of the entire Black Hebrew Israelite movement; pioneered the Exodus-as-literal-genealogy framework later groups would build on.
WHERE IT FELL SHORT	Records of the church's early activities are sparse; historians describe its founding circumstances as debated, and academics have criticized the movement broadly for historical revisionism with no supporting evidence.

GENERATION 12 · 1894-1919

Church of God and Saints of Christ

William Saunders Crowdy · founded 1896, Lawrence, KS

VISION	Crowdy, a former slave and Union Army veteran, claimed visions and angelic visitations beginning in 1886 revealing that Black people were the Twelve Lost Tribes of Israel.
PEAK MEMBERSHIP	Grew to over 200 "tabernacles" (congregations) and 37,000 members by 1936.
WHAT IT BUILT	Still operating today, headquartered in Belleville, VA, with branches that reached Cuba, the West Indies, and several African countries; calls itself the oldest African American congregation adhering to Judaism's tenets.
WHERE IT FELL SHORT	Crowdy was jailed at least 22 times while preaching through the South; he never converted to actual Judaism, and the church's claims of Hebrew descent are rejected by mainstream Jewish institutions and by most historians as without evidentiary support.

Moorish Science Temple of America

Noble Drew Ali (born Timothy Drew) · founded 1913, Newark, NJ

VISION	Drew Ali declared himself a prophet and taught that African Americans were not "Negroes" but Moors — descendants of the ancient Moabites and Canaanites with lineage to Morocco — whose true religion was Islam, revealed in his self-authored Circle Seven Koran (1927).
PEAK MEMBERSHIP	Roughly 15,000 members across 17 temples by the late 1920s, growing to an estimated 30,000 by the 1930s, concentrated in Chicago, Detroit, and Philadelphia.
WHAT IT BUILT	The first mass Islamic-identified religious community in Black America; directly seeded the Nation of Islam (Wallace Fard Muhammad was a member, known as David Ford-El); gave thousands of Great Migration arrivals a new sense of identity and civic pride.
WHERE IT FELL SHORT	Internal embezzlement of temple funds triggered a leadership war; in 1929 a rival leader, Claude Greene, was murdered, and Drew Ali — arrested though never charged — died mysteriously weeks after release on bond. At least three competing factions splintered from the succession crisis, and the movement was never recognized as authentic Islam by the wider Muslim world.

GENERATION 13 · 1919-1944

Commandment Keepers Ethiopian Hebrew Congregation

Wentworth Arthur Matthew · founded 1919, Harlem, NY

VISION	Matthew preached a "restoration" of Judaism, teaching that Black Americans were the original Israelites who had lost touch with their birthright through slavery and the imposition of Christianity by enslavers.
PEAK MEMBERSHIP	Remained relatively small and marginal even at its height; trained over 20 rabbis who went on to lead congregations across the US and Caribbean.
WHAT IT BUILT	Founded the Israelite Rabbinical Academy (1930), formalizing Black Hebrew clergy training; unlike many peer movements, explicitly preached kindness toward white Jews rather than separatism.
WHERE IT FELL SHORT	Matthew was twice rebuffed in his attempts to join the mainstream New York Board of Rabbis; the congregation was never accepted by normative Judaism and remained a small, dominant-but-marginal organization within the wider Black Hebrew movement.

United House of Prayer for All People

Charles Manuel "Daddy" Grace (Marcelino Manuel da Graça) · founded 1919, West Wareham, MA

VISION	Grace, a Cape Verdean immigrant, claimed a direct commission from God to preach and presented himself as an intermediary with the power to grant or withhold salvation — "Grace has given God a vacation."
PEAK MEMBERSHIP	Claimed 3,000,000 members in over 350 houses of prayer across 60 cities by 1960 (almost certainly inflated); today verified at 27,500–50,000 members in 137 locations across 29 states.
WHAT IT BUILT	Held racially integrated revival services across the segregated South decades before the civil rights movement; the church survives and thrives today, having built affordable housing and community investment programs under later leadership.
WHERE IT FELL SHORT	Grace was widely accused by journalists of being a self-enriching "racketeer" who funded a lavish lifestyle (purple suits, jewels, a chauffeured entourage) from poor followers' donations; his 1960 death triggered a court battle over succession and assets before the organization stabilized.

Nation of Islam (founding era)

Wallace Fard Muhammad, then Elijah Muhammad (Elijah Poole) · founded 1930, Detroit, MI

VISION	Fard taught he was Allah in person and that Black Americans were the original "Asiatic" people whose history had been stolen; Elijah Muhammad, who succeeded him, taught that white people were a race of "devils" created 6,000 years ago by a Black scientist named Yakub, and declared himself the Messenger of Allah.
PEAK MEMBERSHIP	Fard's original Detroit temple grew to roughly 8,000 members before his 1934 disappearance; under Elijah Muhammad it grew into the tens of thousands nationally by the civil rights era.
WHAT IT BUILT	Built a self-sufficient Black economic network of farms, schools, and businesses; the University of Islam educated children outside the segregated public system; produced Malcolm X, the movement's most consequential spokesman.
WHERE IT FELL SHORT	Fard's 1934 disappearance was never explained. The Yakub origin story is regarded by historians and mainstream Muslims alike as theologically baseless. Malcolm X broke from the Nation in 1964 over Elijah Muhammad's moral conduct and was assassinated in 1965 by NOI members. The group's core theology has never been accepted as orthodox Islam.

GENERATION 14 · 1944–1969

Five Percent Nation (Nation of Gods and Earths)

Clarence 13X (Clarence Edward Smith) · founded 1964, Harlem, NY

VISION	Clarence, a former NOI student minister, broke away after questioning the divinity of the light-skinned Wallace Fard Muhammad; he taught instead that the Black man collectively was Allah, with humanity divided into the 85% (ignorant), the 10% (the deceptive elite), and the enlightened 5% who taught the truth.
PEAK MEMBERSHIP	Began with a handful of Harlem followers; grew into a loosely organized national presence with no formal membership rolls, its reach magnified enormously through hip-hop culture.
WHAT IT BUILT	Became deeply embedded in hip-hop's foundational vocabulary and artists (Rakim, Wu-Tang Clan, Poor Righteous Teachers, Brand Nubian, Nas), giving it cultural influence vastly disproportionate to its formal size.
WHERE IT FELL SHORT	Clarence 13X was killed by unknown attackers in Harlem in 1969, just five years after founding the movement; with no centralized leadership structure ever established, it fragmented into independent, loosely affiliated local groups and was investigated by the FBI as early as 1965.

African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem (founding)

Ben Ammi Ben-Israel (born Ben Carter) · founded 1966 (Chicago); emigrated 1969

VISION	Ben Ammi claimed the Angel Gabriel appeared to him in 1966 instructing him to lead African Americans to the Promised Land and establish the Kingdom of God prophesied in the Book of Daniel.
PEAK MEMBERSHIP	Roughly 350 African Americans made the initial 1967 "exodus" to Liberia; the Israel-based community grew to about 5,000 worldwide by Ben Ammi's death in 2014, with roughly 3,000 living in Dimona today.
WHAT IT BUILT	Built a self-sustaining vegan, communal village (the Village of Peace) in Dimona, Israel; became the largest organized community of African American expatriates in the world; gained Israeli permanent residency for its members in 1990.
WHERE IT FELL SHORT	Members were never recognized as Jewish by Israeli authorities, and many faced deportation in the movement's early decades; Ben Ammi's rhetoric — accusing Israel of racism and claiming a conspiracy theory about Jewish and Palestinian ancestry — drew sustained accusations of antisemitism.

GENERATION 15 · 1969–1994

Oyotunji African Village

Oba Efuntola Oseijeman Adefunmi I · founded 1970, Sheldon, SC

VISION	Adefunmi, initiated into Orisha-Vodun priesthood in Haiti and Yoruba Ifá priesthood in Nigeria, sought to physically rebuild a living Yoruba kingdom on American soil — deliberate cultural reconstruction rather than a single prophetic revelation.
PEAK MEMBERSHIP	Grew from about 5 to between 200 and 250 residents at its 1970s peak; today reduced to roughly 5-9 families.
WHAT IT BUILT	The first and only deliberately reconstructed African (Yoruba) kingdom on US soil, built — pointedly — on the site of a former slave plantation; preserved and transmitted Orisha worship, ceremony, and language directly rather than through syncretism.
WHERE IT FELL SHORT	Repeated relocations after noise disputes with neighbors over ceremonial drumming; the population has fallen by over 95% from its peak as younger generations left for education and jobs elsewhere.

MOVE

John Africa (born Vincent Leaphart) · founded 1972, Philadelphia, PA

VISION	A functionally illiterate Korean War veteran, Leaphart dictated a 300-page manifesto called "The Guidelines" to a University of Pennsylvania social worker, preaching that all life — human, animal, and plant — was equally sacred and that technology and government were inherently corrupting.
PEAK MEMBERSHIP	Exact numbers were never documented, but the group sustained a committed, multi-generational communal membership in West Philadelphia for over a decade.
WHAT IT BUILT	Sustained organized protest against police brutality, animal cruelty, and the Vietnam War years before such positions were mainstream; its survivors successfully sued the city of Philadelphia and won a formal city apology in 2020.
WHERE IT FELL SHORT	A 1978 standoff killed a police officer (nine members were convicted and imprisoned for decades). On May 13, 1985, Philadelphia police dropped two bombs on MOVE's headquarters; the resulting fire killed John Africa and ten others, including five children, and destroyed 65 homes in the surrounding neighborhood.

Nation of Yahweh

Yahweh ben Yahweh (born Hulon Mitchell Jr.) · founded 1979, Miami, FL

VISION	A former Nation of Islam member, Mitchell claimed to have known he was divine since age 3 and declared himself "Yahweh ben Yahweh" — God, the son of God — preaching that Jesus and the biblical prophets were Black and that white people were "devils."
PEAK MEMBERSHIP	Claimed around 20,000 members across 45 cities at its late-1980s peak, with a real-estate portfolio reaching an estimated \$100 million.
WHAT IT BUILT	Brought visible economic revitalization to Miami's Liberty City — enough that the city's mayor declared an official "Yahweh Ben Yahweh Day" in 1990, weeks before his arrest.
WHERE IT FELL SHORT	An elite enforcement squad called the "Death Angels" murdered at least 14 people, several by beheading, as loyalty initiations; Yahweh ben Yahweh was convicted of conspiracy to commit murder in 1992 and served 11 years in federal prison. The group is classified as a black supremacist hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

GENERATION 16 · 1994-2019

Nation of Islam (Farrakhan era)

Louis Farrakhan · founded Rebuilt 1978-1981 after Elijah Muhammad's 1975 death

VISION	Farrakhan taught that Elijah Muhammad had personally commanded him, in spirit, to continue leading Black Americans to liberation, restoring the original NOI theology that Elijah Muhammad's son had abandoned in favor of orthodox Islam.
PEAK MEMBERSHIP	An estimated 20,000-50,000 members across more than 60 mosques nationally.
WHAT IT BUILT	Organized the 1995 Million Man March in Washington, D.C., one of the largest political gatherings in US history; in his later years moved the Nation's practice closer to orthodox Sunni prayer and Ramadan observance.
WHERE IT FELL SHORT	Farrakhan has been repeatedly and specifically condemned for antisemitic statements by mainstream civil rights organizations and faith leaders alike; the Nation's core theology remains rejected by the worldwide Muslim community, and its membership has never approached the scale of its public profile.

Compiled from a conversational research session, drawing on Wikipedia, Britannica, Encyclopedia.com, EBSCO Research Starters, the Anti-Defamation League, the Southern Poverty Law Center, and primary reporting on each movement. Membership figures are best historical estimates and are frequently disputed even among scholars — founders and the press both had incentives to inflate them. This document is a synthesis for personal reference, not a peer-reviewed publication.