



HORIZON

WINTER, 1964 • VOLUME VI, NUMBER 1

© 1964 by American Heritage Publishing Co., Inc. All rights reserved under Berne and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. Reproduction in whole or in part of any article without permission is prohibited. U.S. Copyright is not claimed for pages 97-104 or for the color plates on pages 18, 25, 65, and 92.
Printed in the United States of America.

Black man is original man, say the black Muslims;
he is the wisest, most powerful, most beautiful.
As the Muslims find a sense of dignity in their African
past, they avoid being "contaminated" by
whites, and proclaim "let us separate—but utterly."

By MORROE BERGER

The Black Muslims

Although there have been Islamic revival movements among American Negroes for many years, it is only recently that one of them has attracted wide attention. This is the Nation of Islam, popularly known as the "Black Muslims," led by their "Messenger the Honorable Mr. Elijah Muhammad" and younger spokesmen with equally odd names like Malcolm X. (They insist on being called Muslims rather than Moslems. The first spelling happens to come closer to the correct pronunciation of the Arabic word, but the black Muslims seem to regard it as something more than merely a matter of transliteration from one language to another.) Until now, the association of American Negroes with the Islamic religion stirred nothing more than mild curiosity and tolerant amusement. Anyway, few people saw the fezzes and colorful flowing gowns, heard the prayers to Allah in English, or were aware of the efforts to resurrect African power and splendor. Now derision has turned to alarm. The black Muslims' combination of an exotic religion and a passionate rejection of white America has propelled them out of the jails and Negro neighborhoods, where their power was first noticed, and into the disturbed consciousness of the nation.

Spokesmen for the black Muslims never tire of insisting that the original religion of Negroes was Islam, that their language was Arabic, and that they had a distinctively African culture. Repeating Elijah Muhammad's own teachings, Minister Malcolm X, the most articulate and best known of the Muslim leaders, told an open meeting: "The white man kidnapped us from our high culture and civilization in Africa, stole us and then stole our religion, our language, and our civilization and made us into animals." This absolute identification of Negroes with Islam and Arabic is of course an exaggeration, but it contains an element of truth that has long been unknown or ignored, not only in the popular mind but in scholarship as well. It will be useful, therefore, before examining the black Muslims of today, to look at the American Negroes' attitude toward the African past, and their historic relation to Islam both in Africa and, surprisingly, our own country.

It is not only the "black nationalists" who are exhilarated by the great changes in Africa in our generation; even Negroes who have thought of Africa only as a gigantic primitive jungle now cannot repress a flush of pride as independent Africa emerges.

"The earth is our promised land," Muslim leaders like Malcolm X, opposite, instruct their followers, "and we are going to take some of it"

Americans have long been proud that Negroes in the United States have enjoyed a far higher standard of living and education than Negroes in Africa. Yet gradualism here and breathtaking change there may soon leave American Negroes the better off materially and economically but the worse off socially and politically. American Negroes, moreover, see the Africans gain dignity, respect, and power as they separate from their white rulers rather than "integrating" with them. Today they are readier to recognize their kinship with Africa and to face the fact that they are culturally different from whites, now that many no longer believe that this kinship and difference mean inferiority. James Baldwin says, "I don't know why it is so important to be white anymore." Lorraine Hansberry asks: ". . . is it necessary to integrate oneself into a burning house?"

Attachment to Africa, based upon a changing mixture of knowledge and sentiment, has always been strong among a few Negro leaders and intellectuals—and probably stronger, if more nebulous, among the voiceless masses who could see little in America that gave them reason to think they were really part of it. Now, paradoxically, the closer they come to sharing the good things of life in this wealthy society, the closer also they come to understanding their relationship to Africa.

For a long time people thought that Africa below the Sahara had no history because most societies there had not possessed a written language. Even now the growing number of universities that teach about Africa feel the need for anthropologists, not historians. The great Negro scholar, W. E. B. Du Bois, who died recently in Ghana at the age of ninety-five,* had written three books since 1915 in an obsessive effort to dispel this misconception among whites and Negroes. In the second one, *Black Folk, Then and Now*, published a quarter-century ago, he wrote concerning this assumption of a historic void: "I remember my own rather sudden awakening from the paralysis of this judgment taught me in high school and in two of the world's great universities. Franz Boas came to Atlanta University where I was teaching history in 1906 and said to a graduating class: You need not be ashamed of your African past; and then he recounted the history of the black kingdoms south of the Sahara for a thousand years. I was too astonished to speak. All of this I had never heard."

As Negroes discovered African history they also discovered their relation to Islam, and some judged it more satisfying than their relation to Christianity. They began to see Negro Christian history as the story of slavery, while Negro Islamic history, though it included slavery, at least had elements of grandeur in it. One reaction to the enslavement of Negroes by Christian Europe and America has been the claim that Negroes are superior Christians to whites. More than forty years ago Carter G. Woodson, an influential Negro scholar who founded *The Journal of Negro History* in 1916, observed: "The religion of Jesus is an Oriental production. It easily appeals to the mind of the Negro, which is also Oriental. The mind of the white man is Occidental. He has, therefore, failed to understand and appreciate Christianity." Others, however, like Edward W. Blyden,

a West Indian, praised the role of Islam in Africa. A firm believer in the back-to-Africa movement, Blyden insisted that Arab culture and the religion of Islam were more congenial to Negroes. Almost a century ago he warned that Islam, rather than Christianity, would eventually dominate pagan Africa because it was a greater force for progress among Negroes. "The Negro," he said, "came into contact with Christianity as a slave and a follower at a distance. He came into contact with Mohammedanism as a man, and often as a leader." Blyden was a man of extraordinary learning and taste who had won distinction as a Christian missionary, educator, author, and diplomat. Highly esteemed in America and England, he was elected a fellow of the American Philological Association and vice-president of the American Colonization Society, which was established in 1816, with the support of, among others, Thomas Jefferson and Henry Clay, to help Negroes go back to Africa, where the Society founded Liberia.

Blyden was so convinced that Islam was better for Africans than Christianity that he felt obliged to leave the Christian ministry. This act and the convictions that led to it, along with Blyden's appointment as supervisor of Muslim education in Sierra Leone, persuaded many people that he had himself become a Muslim. He had not, but American Presbyterian circles were dismayed anyway. Their shiniest back-to-Africa showpiece became an embarrassment by wanting to go back just a little too far. According to a former president of Lincoln University, an institution for Negroes supported by the Presbyterian Church, annoyance over Blyden led the American Presbyterians to leave the small band of Liberian Presbyterians to their own resources in 1894. The university, he adds, did not admit a single Liberian student during this century until, just after World War II, he welcomed young Edward W. Blyden III to Oxford, Pennsylvania.



What lies in the African past—the beginning of man himself?

What has scholarship found out about African history? It has discovered the important role that black men have played as individuals in Africa and elsewhere—kings and emperors of large African domains, such as Musa of Mali, a Muslim who conquered Timbuktu in the fourteenth century and then enhanced its great reputation; al-Mansur (Almanzor), a mulatto who extended Muslim power in southern Spain in the tenth century; or Bilal, the Negro who became the first muezzin (caller to prayer) of the Prophet Muhammad himself. Scholarship has also uncovered something much more significant: Negro African societies of medieval times that were as advanced in social organization and perhaps in some material accomplishments as contemporary societies in Europe, as well as the Negroid elements in ancient civilizations like the Egyptian and Ethiopian

*Du Bois was one of the founders of the N.A.A.C.P., broke with the organization over questions of "policy," became increasingly nationalist and leftist until he joined the Communist Party in 1961 at the age of ninety-three.

or the medieval Islamic civilization in Africa and Spain. What is more, some prehistorians believe that it was in Africa that human life developed out of the animal. Professor L. S. B. Leakey, a leading British scholar working on this subject, states flatly: "Africa's first contribution to human progress, then, was the evolution of man himself." When, therefore, Elijah Muhammad says that the black is "original man," it may be not so much groundless pride as merely religious hyperbole. Only after some six hundred thousand years, Leakey adds, did Africa lose its "dominant role in world progress" to Asia Minor and southern Europe, probably because the expansion of deserts "cut off Africa from the rest of the world," and because the African climate reduced human incentive by providing an abundance of both disease and food.

Though leadership passed out of Africa, the "dark continent" continued to produce thriving societies even during the "dark ages." These were Negro cultures, both pagan and Muslim, as well as cultures created and led by mixed groups of Negroes, whites, and North African Berbers, in West and Central Africa, and on the eastern coast from the Gulf of Aden to Madagascar.

One of the earliest of these advanced West African states was called Ghana. It probably arose in the fourth century A.D. when North African Berbers (perhaps Jews) settled among the blacks near the Niger River southwest of what later became known as Timbuktu. In the eighth century the blacks, under the Soninke dynasty, took power and ruled for five hundred years. The wealth of Ghana came mainly from its abundance of gold, which afforded it a magnificent court life and a thriving trade with North Africa. At its height, from the ninth to the middle of the eleventh century, it was famous for its great capital, Kumbi, which was separated into two districts. One was inhabited largely by Muslims, among whom were some eminent doctors of the law. Probably because of their learning, Muslims held high posts in the pagan Negro court as interpreters and royal ministers. The other part of the city was the royal seat. Late in the eleventh century Ghana, always a prize because of its wealth, fell to the Almoravids, who came down from the north fighting holy wars for Islam and spreading the faith by the sword. The Almoravids, mainly Berbers but with a substantial Negro admixture, soon were divided in victory, and the original rulers were able to recover their independence. They, too, however, could not maintain unity, and the great period of ancient Ghana ended in the thirteenth century. More than seven hundred years later, in 1957, the leaders of a new Africa gave the name Ghana to a former British colony, the Gold Coast, which lies several hundred miles southeast of the ancient kingdom's capital.

The people of ancient Ghana were pagan and spoke one of the Mandingo languages. Farther south was another Mandingo culture, where a Muslim convert, Sundiata, came to power in the middle of the thirteenth century. He expanded his domain in several directions, took declining Ghana itself in 1240, and laid the basis for another great empire, the Mali, covering most of what was later known as French West Africa and the present independent state of Mali. Sundiata created a capital at Niani on

the Niger River that became famous under his most prominent successor, Mansa (Emperor) Musa, who ruled from 1307 to 1332. Musa's pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324 literally put his empire and capital city on the map of Europe. He traveled in extraordinary pomp, with five hundred slaves and great stores of gold. Everyone along the route in both directions profited from his passage, and in Cairo the sophisticated traders were talking about him years later, as they still tried to recover from the fall in the price of gold caused by the large amount he had put into circulation. After his return, his material resources diminished, but he acquired a distinct intellectual aura supplied by the learned men who accompanied him and settled in his two famous cities, Mali and Timbuktu. Among them was an Arab poet and architect from Granada, Ibrahim El Saheli, who built several mosques of burnt brick, a material he introduced into that area.

Well over a century later there were still traces of wealth and piety in Mali, according to Leo Africanus. He was an Arab Muslim from Spain who was captured by pirates to be sold into slavery. Impressed by his travels and his learning, they took him to Rome and presented him to the Medici pope, Leo X. This son of Lorenzo the Magnificent and patron of Raphael freed the captive, made him a member of the papal court, gave him his own name, and had him converted to Christianity. Visiting Mali around 1510, Leo Africanus wrote: "The inhabitants are rich . . . Here are great stores of temples, priests and professors . . . The people of this region excel all other Negroes in wit, civility, and industry, and were the first that embraced the law of Muhammad."

By Leo's time, however, the Mali empire was in decline and had already been overshadowed by one of its former vassals, the Songhay kingdom with its capital at Gao, about seven hundred miles east of the city of Mali. The Songhay area had been settled in the seventh century by pagan Berbers, who established their rule over the blacks. With the southward sweep of Islam, the rulers became Muslims early in the eleventh century, and as time went on the Berber element thinned out and the Negro character became dominant. Most of the population remained pagan despite their Muslim leaders. After winning their independence from Mali, these leaders rapidly expanded at the expense of their former masters and built the greatest African empire since ancient Egypt. At its height, in the fifteenth century, it was known as an intellectual center; it had a powerful army and a good administration, and its most prominent ruler, Askia Muhammad I, was a Negro who took his religion seriously.

At the end of the sixteenth century the Songhay kingdom fell victim to northern Moors who coveted their wealth and trade. The invading army, with firearms strange to the Songhay, entered Gao in 1591 expecting to find the splendor and riches which they had heard so much about and which had beckoned them during the strenuous six-month desert march. But they were disappointed at the size of the town and at the fact that the fleeing inhabitants had carried off everything the invaders could have wanted.

While these West African empires were rising and falling, ad-

vanced communities could also be found on the eastern coast. These Muslim cities—such as Zeila, Kilwá, and Zanzibar—prospered through trade from medieval times down to the turn of the sixteenth century, when the Portuguese Vasco da Gama worked his way around the Cape of Good Hope to East Africa and India. Zeila appears to have been a teeming port. The Arab traveler Ibn Battúta, who saw it probably in 1331, described the town as apparently prosperous though unpleasant. Its sheep were famous for their butter, but the large amounts of fish and slaughtered camels produced such a stink that, despite a rough sea, he preferred to sleep on board ship. The people were Negro Muslims, but many were lacking in piety. His thumbnail description of Zeila: "It is a large city with a great bazaar, but it is the dirtiest, most abominable, and most stinking town in the world."

When Ibn Battúta later that year reached Kilwá, south of Zanzibar, he was more pleased. He found the people devoted and pious Muslims and, indeed, engaged at that moment in a Holy War against nearby pagans. He pronounced his judgment concisely: "Kilwá is a very fine and substantially built town." Seventy-four years later, in 1405, a German traveler witnessed the sack of Kilwá by the Portuguese. He remarked the "many vaulted mosques, one of which is like that of Córdoba," and the large stone and mortar buildings with varied designs in plaster.

Much of African history has been obscured by the interpenetration of Muslim and Negro peoples during these centuries. What was once considered to be strictly Arab or Muslim or Moorish history must now be regarded as Negro and Negroid as well. Though Islam expanded steadily in Africa from the time of its own founding in the early seventh century, three events stand out in this process (which, indeed, is still going on). The first is the slow but steady movement of people from Arabia across the Red Sea into East Africa, which even antedated the rise of Islam in the seventh century. Muslim influence did not become substantial, however, until three to five centuries later. The second great wave came from the north in the eleventh century, when pious warriors, the Almoravids (whose Arabic name connotes a group of men in a combination retreat and border fort), crossed the Sahara, conquered ancient Ghana, and converted the rulers of a vast belt across the African continent and, with less success, the masses of its people. They also crossed the Mediterranean and conquered all of Muslim Spain, and so became masters of a domain stretching from the Senegal River to the Ebro. Finally, in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century, the Fulani of West Africa spread Muslim domination to the east.

The Islam that won the allegiance of millions in Africa south of the Sahara is not exactly the same as the Islam of the Near East. African Islam is strongly influenced by indigenous religious systems and other cultural traits, yet it is accepted by Muslims everywhere, for there is no strict orthodoxy in Islam. The flexibility of Muslims has indeed been a great asset in their growth in Africa. Islam's lead over Christianity is thus the result of two main factors: the Muslims came to Africa earlier, and they be-

came one with the Africans; the Christians came later and remained strangers to Africa—many of them knowledgeable, charitable, and sacrificing, but even the best of them strangers.

Any attempt to evaluate these African societies is difficult not only because the criteria are not clear but also because information is so scanty. To say that Africa has "no history" is to say either that we know little of it or that it has no grandeur. It is the latter point, of course, that is meant when someone who denigrates African societies also denies that they have any past at all. If it is important, in keeping the Negro down, to deny him a place in history, it is equally important for *him* to establish his place in it. As Du Bois put it, "Africa was no integral part of the world, because the world which raped it had to pretend that it had not harmed a man but a thing."

B

The slave trade:

Is it a real link with
Muslims of Africa?

ut what of Negroes and Muslims in America? The link connecting the three was the slave trade of the sixteenth century. African Negroes had for centuries been enslaved by other African Negroes and by Christians, Muslims, and Jews. The slavery that began in the New World, however, was to become a tremendous impressment of human labor, created to meet the growing demands of the commercial and industrial revolutions in Europe and America. The African slave became a basic resource in a system of profit.

The black Muslims today stress the enslavement of Negroes by the Christian West (they either do not believe that Muslims enslaved Negroes or prefer to ignore the fact), for slavery in the Americas was especially brutal and on a very large scale. Muslims had enslaved blacks out of greed and inhumanity, but many Christians were unwilling to admit that they acted only out of these base, but at least human, motives—they felt compelled to cover their guilt by arguing that God had ordained slavery for black men, and that it was good for them.

We should not be surprised, therefore, if the Negro finds his historical relationship to Islam the more satisfying. There is nothing in the Islamic past, for example, to match the story of Bartolomé de Las Casas, the great humanitarian bishop of sixteenth-century Spain who yet managed, ironically and to his own mortification, to advance the enslavement of Negroes in the New World. Las Casas arrived in the West Indies ten years after Columbus. At first no more disturbed than others at the moral and physical breakdown of the enslaved Indians, he slowly became intensely concerned about it. At this time the Spanish colonists, dissatisfied anyway with the disintegration of the Indians in slave labor, were demanding the right to import Negro slaves first from Spain and Portugal and then directly from Africa. In their view, if the Indians were unsuitable—and if human-

itarians like Las Casas were agitating for an end to their slavery—then a new labor supply would have to be provided. In 1517 Las Casas was back in Spain to persuade the authorities to protect the Indians. Asked to draw up a plan for the King, he proposed two actions: inducements to free workers to go to the West Indies, and the importation of Negro slaves to replace the Indians, who were to be freed. Since black slaves were wanted, the second proposal was adopted and the first ignored.

From the sixteenth century until the prohibition of the slave trade three hundred years later, ten to fifteen million Africans were exported to the Americas. Meanwhile probably other millions were forcibly removed to Asia, and still others, in untold numbers, perished in the mad competition between Europeans and Africans and Asians to capture slaves for the insatiable market. These doomed unfortunates came from various parts of Africa, but the vast majority were from the long stretch of land along the western coast from the Senegal River down to Angola and a few hundred miles inland.

A substantial portion of the people from this area had either become Muslims by the fifteenth century or were to become Muslims during the heyday of the slave trade. It should not surprise us, therefore, if many of the slaves brought to the United States were really Muslim. But how many? This is a historical puzzle. We not only do not know even approximately how many Muslims there were, but we have only scraps of information about the question we are asking. It is almost as if the black Muslims today were right—that the Africans were stripped of Islam, that there is a conspiracy to keep the whole subject from coming to light, that few were interested in the religion of the slaves, or in anything else that might have suggested they were human beings. There were missionaries, of course, intent upon converting the slaves to Christianity, but they were interested only in the Negroes' new religion, and they left little evidence of any religion brought along in the slave ships from Africa.

In the United States we have not tried so hard to eradicate the memory, or the evidence, of slavery as has Brazil, where in 1890, two years after abolition, an official decree declared the government was "under the obligation of destroying all traces of the system for the sake of the nation's reputation . . ." The wonder in our own country today is that there is still no interest in or even awareness of the question of Islam among the slaves. In this century only a few Negro scholars have shown any interest in that aspect of our history, but in the middle of the nineteenth century three prominent white Americans tried to illuminate it.

The first was Theodore Dwight (1796–1866), the son of one of the Connecticut Wits, great-grandson of Jonathan Edwards, nephew of one president of Yale University and the cousin of another. The second was William Brown Hodgson (1801–1871), born into an obscure family in Delaware, a linguist with little formal education, who married the daughter of Edward Telfair, rich merchant, large landowner, a leader of Savannah colonial society and a governor of Georgia. The third was James Hamilton Couper (1794–1866), Georgia planter and son of a planter,

an early scientific experimenter, an amateur geologist who entertained Sir Charles Lyell for a fortnight at his model plantation, and a cultured gentleman.

These three were brought together by their common interest in ethnology. All were members of the American Ethnological Society in New York, established in 1842. All three contributed papers during the Society's first year—Dwight on a Negro Muslim group in Africa, Hodgson on the languages of Africa north and south of the Sahara, and Couper on one of his Muslim slaves. Yet they were rather different in attitude. Dwight, the Calvinist Yankee, wrote favorably about the Negro in the South and in Africa. Hodgson, the border-state plebeian who had won his way to intellectual and social prominence, regarded Negroes as inferior and defended slavery. Couper, the Southern patrician, owner of five hundred slaves, had opposed Secession (though he lost two of his five sons who fought as Confederates) and showed an interest in the welfare of his slaves.

As early as 1830 or so, Dwight had already become interested in the African background of American Negroes and had met in New York a Muslim slave from the South. He took down the stories of three such former slaves. "Among the victims of the slave-trade among us," he wrote, fully expecting to surprise the readers of the *Methodist Quarterly Review*, "have been men of learning and pure and exalted characters, who have been treated like beasts of the field by those who claimed a purer religion."

Hodgson was not troubled by such matters. The London *Times* correspondent covering the Civil War breakfasted at his famous residence, where he saw "in attendance some good-looking Negro boys and men dressed in liveries, which smacked of our host's Orientalism." Hodgson thus seems to have been interested in American Muslim slaves as ethnographical subjects, linguistic informants, and decorative curios. He could not have been animated, as was Dwight, by a desire to see their cultural attainments and potentialities recognized, for Hodgson was one of a group of Northern and Southern scholars and sheer racists who made a great point of establishing Negro inferiority and white supremacy through paleontology, ethnology, craniology, and anything else that yielded "scientific" defenses of slavery.

Dwight, Hodgson, and Couper uncovered or named all of the six individual Muslim slaves whose stories have to any extent been made known. Hodgson alone mentioned five of them in 1857. Except for one, they were probably born in the latter part of the eighteenth century. They had both American and Arabic names, or corruptions of the latter, but a couple were called Prince, perhaps out of mixed condescension for their slave status and mock respect for their literacy.

One of the best known of these Muslim slaves was Bul-Ali (also Belali and Belali Mohomet), the slave driver of a prominent planter, Thomas Spalding of Sapelo Island, Georgia. His great-granddaughter and other progeny were still living there in the 1930's, when their stories were taken down by Georgia writers employed by the Works Progress Administration. Katie Brown, whose grandmother and her sisters were the daughters of Bul-Ali, said of them (in her archaic dialect): "Dey wuz bery puhticluh

bout duh time dey pray an dey bery regluh bout duh hour. . . . Dey bow tuh duh sun an hab lill mat tuh kneel on." A friend of Bul-Ali was Tom (Sali-Bul-Ali), a slave driver on Couper's plantation, of whom his owner wrote: "His industry, intelligence, and honesty soon brought him into notice, and he was successively advanced . . . He is a strict Mahometan; abstains from spirituous liquors, and keeps various fasts, particularly that of the Rhamadan. He is singularly exempt from all feeling of superstition; and holds in great contempt the African belief in fetishes and evil spirits."

Probably the most learned of the Muslim slaves was Job, the son of Solomon, born in 1701 or 1702 in the Kingdom of Futa near the Gambia River. Sent to the coast by his father to trade with the English, he was captured in 1730 by other Africans and sold to the very ship captain with whom he was supposed to trade. Before he could be bought back by his father, the ship set sail for America. Job landed in Maryland, where he worked on tobacco plantations until he escaped and was jailed. As his misfortune became known, offers of help poured in. His passage to England was arranged and there, as in America, he favorably impressed everyone he met by his excellent appearance, dignity, and learning. He knew the Koran by heart, and en route to England he wrote out three copies of it without once looking at a previous one. He met royalty and the royal family. Among the lesser of his acquaintances was the collector and physician Sir Hans Sloane, president of the Royal Society, for whom Job translated Arabic inscriptions of several kinds. Job finally arrived at his African home in 1735 or 1736, but he did not forget his English friends. He wrote to them several times about his problems, not unlike those which Asian and African students in America now face when they return to their countries. Finally, he turned to commerce, suggesting to the English that he could supply them directly with the gum arabic they were then buying through the French.

There were many other known Muslim slaves whose individual stories were not written down. Couper reported a dozen on his plantation. Bul-Ali was only one of the many mentioned on Sapelo Island. An escaped slave, Charles Ball, wrote in 1837 that on the Carolina plantations where he had served there were many slaves still coming from Africa, among them "several who must have been, from what I have since learned, Mohammedans; though at that time I had never heard of the religion of Mohammed." A missionary, C. C. Jones, writing around 1842, referred once in a substantial book on *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States* to Muslim slaves: "The Mohammedan Africans remaining of the old stock of importations, although accustomed to hear the Gospel preached, have been known to accommodate Christianity to Mohammedanism. 'God,' say they, is *Allah*, and Jesus Christ is *Mohammed* the religion is the same, but different countries have different names."

It seems clear that there were many Muslim slaves, that they were regarded as superior by themselves and others, and that they managed to remain loyal to their religion despite the uncongenial environment. They were among the tougher breeds of

slaves, resisting more tenaciously that process of cultural dispossession through which all were put. Muslim slaves, as must have been known at that time, were especially incorrigible in Brazil, where they fought not only against the masters but against other slaves who refused to adopt Islam, and in the seventeenth century were able to maintain intermittently their own armed community, known as the Palmares Republic, while the colonists were busy staving off Dutch invasions. Muslim slaves in Brazil also mounted serious insurrections in the nineteenth century.

European knowledge of these proclivities of Muslim Africans may have limited the number brought to America as slaves. Portugal and Spain, late in the fifteenth century, allowed only Christian Negro slaves from Africa to be imported (although this prohibition was often evaded.) Furthermore, it was not until 1492 that the Christians finally subdued Granada, the last Muslim kingdom in Spain, and the memory of that eight-hundred-year struggle was still green. So the Spaniards were not eager to begin over again and allow Muslims in the New World, where even Christian Negro slaves—so the colonists complained—too easily melted among the Indians and excited them against slavery. Moreover, the European Christians, well aware of the powerful missionary complex of Islam, preferred to eliminate such fierce competition for the souls of Indians and Negroes. As late as 1687 this bar against importing Muslims, despite violations, was still in force. In that year the Spanish Council of the Indies recommended to the king of Spain the abrogation of a contract with the Dutch to supply African slaves, on the ground that if a Catholic power had to forbid "the introduction of Mohammedan slaves into America . . . on account of the danger which lies in their intercourse with the Indians," how much more must they restrain the heretical Protestant Dutch?

This was a deterrent from the demand side; there was also a deterrent from the supply side. Edward Blyden, who went to Africa around 1850, when oral tradition was still fairly reliable on the subject, insisted that Islam was a protection, if not a guarantee, against slavery. "The introduction of Islam into Central and West Africa," he wrote in *The Methodist Quarterly* in 1871, "has been the most important if not the sole preservative against the desolations of the slave-trade. Mohammedanism furnished a protection to the tribes who embraced it by effectually binding them together in one strong religious fraternity, and enabling them by their united effort to baffle the attempts of powerful pagan slave hunters."

Negro Muslims in nineteenth-century America had been either born into or converted to their religion in Africa, or—if American-born—were the children of slaves who had been Muslims in Africa. But the religion of twentieth-century Negro Muslims seems to have been imported from abroad, rather than to derive from any vestiges of earlier Islamic groups among the slaves. It is quite possible that some of the various American Muslim groups of the past half-century or so had their roots in these vestiges, that the tradition was handed down in a weak chain from generation to generation. But there is no evidence to support this. When Islam reappears in our time, it has no

apparent continuity with the past; rather, it arises out of the same despair that produces other messianic movements among exploited peoples in the midst of rapid change, and out of a secular nationalism associated with Africa's struggle for freedom and independence.

A

Themes that inspire Muslims today began in the nineteenth century

American Negroes in the nineteenth century did, however, develop and sustain three major related themes and movements that inspired later groups, including the Muslims: the struggle for equality here, the interest in Africa, and the attachment to the land. The struggle for equality failed as the nation turned, after the Civil War and Reconstruction, to industrial and geographical expansion and let the South lick its wounds and deal as it wished with the freedmen. The interest in Africa was sustained by only a few writers and leaders; the American Colonization Society, in existence for nearly half a century at the time of the Emancipation Proclamation, remained true to its origin by attracting more support from prominent whites than from ordinary Negroes who might emigrate to Africa. But the passion of a peasant people for land flared up brightly and then, like other yearnings, receded after the Reconstruction ended in 1876. The idea of colonization itself had been applied not only to Africa but also to the United States. As early as 1825 a member of Congress proposed that the Federal government should buy Indian lands west of the Rockies, where free Negroes could settle. For a short time after the defeat of the South in 1865, it looked as if abandoned lands there might be given to the freed black men who had slaved on them, but the goal of "forty acres and a mule" proved a mirage.

When the Federal government failed to undertake large-scale programs to help Negroes migrate and acquire land, Negroes tried to pool their meager resources to lay hands upon a part of the vast stretches of public land in the West, much of which they saw being settled by recent immigrants from Europe. In 1879 a former slave led thousands of Negroes to Kansas, where they founded several rural colonies. Benjamin "Pap" Singleton called himself the "Moses of the Colored Exodus," but his colonies failed to hold the migrants in the face of hardship, lack of assistance from the government, and the wide publicity given to their troubles by a U.S. Senate investigating committee.

Old Testament themes and land *somewhere* continued to absorb American Negroes in their quest for freedom and self-respect in the twentieth century. They began to follow self-styled prophets as they went North by the thousands during World War I and as they became disillusioned with the established Christian churches. Some of them even became Jews, while others created their own brand of Judaism. In Philadelphia, for

example, Prophet F. S. Cherry set up the Church of God, which accepted Christ but insisted that He and God and original man were all black. Said to be well versed in Yiddish and Hebrew, Cherry proclaimed that the white gentiles had stolen everything from the black Jews. His followers regarded themselves as the true Jews of the Bible and the "white" Jews as interlopers. To prove his faith in the blackness of Jesus Christ, the Prophet made a standing offer of fifteen hundred dollars to anyone who could produce an authentic picture of Him. Often, during a sermon, the Prophet would suddenly hold up a "picture" of Jesus and shout: "Who in hell is this? Nobody knows! They say it is Jesus. That's a damned lie!" The Prophet seems to have reserved the right of blasphemy to himself.

One of the most important predecessors of current movements that are centered on land and Africa was the Universal Negro Improvement Association, established in 1914 by Marcus Garvey. This Jamaica-born Negro leader captured the imagination of Negro masses in many parts of the world and was a great power in America, where he aroused considerable apprehension among Negro leaders who had just embarked upon a program of integration of Negroes into American life. Many of Garvey's themes still animate black nationalist groups today. Entirely secular in temperament, Garvey attacked Christianity for its failure to protect Negroes against depredation. Though Garvey learned about African history and culture from a part-Negro Egyptian Muslim, Duse Mohammed Ali, he did not stress Islamic themes at all. He remained secular, but wrote many articles for his newspaper, *Negro World*, on the great heritage of Negro civilization, in which he included ancient Egypt and the Moors of medieval times. Just as the black Muslims do today, Garvey warned Negroes against modern white society. "If the Negro is not careful," he said, "he will drink in all the poison of modern civilization and die from the effects of it." As to the past: "The white world has always tried to rob and discredit us of our history. . . . Every student of history, of impartial mind, knows that the Negro once ruled the world."

At the time when Garvey's secular black nationalism was most powerful, several religious nationalist movements espousing Islam were also attracting American Negroes. The year 1919 had ushered in a period of the most serious interracial conflict the nation had seen. In these turbulent years the Ahmadiya Muslims, who had originated in India in the nineteenth century, won some converts in Chicago, the great immigration center for Negroes from the rural South. In 1930 a group of Negroes from Detroit went to Turkey to ask for Turkish citizenship and farm land. And two years later an American Negro turned up in Cairo with a saxophone, announcing that he was a Muslim and was working his way to Mecca.

But the first important revivalist Muslim group in this century was the Moorish Science Temple of America, organized just before World War I by a North Carolina Negro named Timothy Drew. Describing himself as a reincarnation of the Prophet Muhammad, he established a temple in Newark in 1913 and reached the height of his influence a decade later in Chicago,

server to be exotic rituals, pose for Negroes the profound question of their identity and their place in America and the world. This is true for the most educated Negroes as well as the least educated, for the banker and the man on relief, even though Muslim converts from Christianity are most likely to be of lower income, younger, less educated, and with a recent experience of migration. Ceremony is important, as it is in all religions. Open meetings conducted by the Muslims usually begin with the playing of recorded African music, sometimes followed by a Negro modern-jazz group. The committed Muslims are distinctively dressed, though not in uniform. The men usually wear dark suits with the hallmarks of Ivy League style: narrow shoulders and lapels, and three buttons. They wear white shirts and either white bow ties or red four-in-hands. The women wear long plain dresses and white veils over their heads. Meetings are run with quiet efficiency and many hand signals among the young men responsible for physical arrangements and discipline. Each speaker begins with the Arabic greeting (spoken in a pure American accent) *as-salaam alaikum* ("may peace be with you"); the audience responds with *wa alaikum as-salaam*, meaning the same thing. Speakers are usually ministers of mosques, but often the platform is given to other Negro leaders. When the Muslim leaders speak, they play upon the well-rehearsed themes: exploitation of Negroes, their impatience, the need for separation, the evil of whites and the natural goodness of blacks. The audience responds eagerly, and usually in a disciplined way, by calling out: "Yes, sir!" "That's right!" "Beautiful!"

When they know what's coming, a few in the audience will say the familiar words with the speaker. Laughter breaks out from time to time, and applause too. When applauded, the Muslim speaker usually lowers his voice and reverently says, "All praise is due Allah." At the end of the meeting the Muslims in the audience rise for the benediction from the platform; as they hold out their arms, elbows at their sides and palms up, the minister blesses them with a mixture of the opening lines of the Koran and other prayers, and an affirmation that Elijah Muhammad was sent by Allah.

T"We the Black Nation
of the Earth are . . . the best
of all human beings."

The Muslims can be best understood as a reaction to the white stereotype of the Negro. For hundreds of years the American Negro has heard that he belongs to a lower order of humanity; his place in American society seems a confirmation of this judgment. So the Muslims say to the whites: "You do not accept us as equals and you segregate us. Well and good, then let us separate—but utterly." In separating, they reverse every tenet of the white supremacists. They reject segregation as a process dictated by and implying white supremacy, and they reject inte-

gration because they regard it both as impossible and undesirable to contaminate black by association with white. God, they say, is black, original man is black, the greatest contributions to civilization came from blacks, black is pure. White, on the other hand, is soiled and dirty, the whites are a "grafted" rather than an original race, they are warlike and irascible.

The ideas of separation and of white nastiness dovetail. With them goes the notion that Negroes must be alert to white deception, and the feeling, shared by most Negro groups today, that Negroes must command their own struggle. Elijah Muhammad has told his followers: "The Black people in America have for many years been made to feel that they were something of a Divine CURSE. . . . You must not think that about yourself anymore. We the Black Nation of the Earth are the NUMBER ONE owners of it, the best of all human beings. You are the Most Powerful, the Most Beautiful and the Wisest."

Such teachings seem to enable the members of the Nation of Islam to accept not only their identity as Negroes but also their place in American society. Since the demonstration of genuine equality through integration in every single respect appears to be impossible, the Muslims reject the whole idea as undesirable. Instead, Elijah Muhammad told me, it is their mission to prepare the Negroes of North America for separation and self-government by teaching them to be clean, to support themselves, and to love and respect their black brothers rather than their white enemies.

As a movement stressing deliverance through adoption of a faith, the Nation of Islam distinguishes sharply between those who accept the faith and those who are eligible but have thus far resisted. The black Muslims are "the most righteous and beautiful people," but the "so-called Negroes" outside the fold are consumed with self-hatred and are really degraded. Once when I referred to the "white stereotype of the Negro," Malcolm X told me: "Most of the things the white people say about the Negro that is bad are not stereotypes; they're true." And Elijah Muhammad chided a large audience: "Stop begging white people to take care of you. . . . You are lazy. You do not want to do anything for yourselves. I am not always going to put the blame on the white man. I am going to put it on you sometimes. To tell you the truth, I think the white people are very nice in giving you a job, in educating you, but I say . . . you still will not do for yourselves." Berating the unenlightened in prophetic style, he asserts: "The slavemaster would be disgracing himself to make a subjected people, who have nothing, his equal."

The Muslims pay a lot of attention to getting *something*. To end the weakness and dependence resulting from a lack of possessions, they preach the investment of such wealth as Negroes have in shops and factories to create further wealth for themselves. In their elementary and secondary school in Chicago, the University of Islam, I saw a poster with a list of Muslim-owned shops enclosed in the circular legend, "Keep the Money in the Circle."

Although the black Muslim movement is thought to attract mostly the poor and the unskilled, it holds up as its ideal a pat-

tern that is distinctly middle class. In this it follows some ideas of Booker T. Washington, now so maligned by Negroes, and of Marcus Garvey. It is ironic that the Protestant ethic of saving and industry should now be spread so assiduously by Negroes who have forsaken Protestant Christianity. Yet Elijah Muhammad's "Twelve Point Program for the Deliverance and Salvation of the American Negro" is pure American Calvinism: "Pool your resources, education, and qualifications for independence." "Make your neighborhood a decent place to live." "Build your own homes, schools, hospitals, and factories." "Stop buying expensive cars, fine clothes, and shoes before being able to live in a fine home." "Build an economic system among yourselves."

Many of the illustrations in the publications of the Nation of Islam carry out this theme of middle-class respectability. One picture showing two couples in a well-furnished living room has the following caption: "Always a charming hostess, Sister Sharrief serves cookies and tea to her guests. Muslims shun the public places of entertainment, but do much entertaining in the quiet and more wholesome atmosphere of their home." When the Muslims began deliberately to appeal to the Negro professional class, their newspaper, *Muhammad Speaks*, said of a recent convert in St. Louis: "Doctor Jenkins is one of the most prosperous and best respected men in the Midwest. He owns his own home plus several buildings. Dr. Jenkins employs a staff of three persons in his private office alone."



An aura of violence
— and a longing
for a piece of land

Such concessions to urban *petit-bourgeois* aspirations, however, do not weaken the traditional yearning of a rural folk for land. The cry for a piece of the earth expresses the hunger for both a means of sustenance and a national territory. It is shouted at every meeting and blazoned in every publication.

Elijah Muhammad said in a major address several years ago: "We are not asking for land that originally belonged to the European people. We are asking for the earth that originally belonged to us. We are going to have a place on this planet that we can call our own. I don't care where it is: whether we are going to have an isle in the Pacific or Atlantic oceans, or if we have to pick up a piece of this country, we are going to have some land. We are not going to wait for a Moses to come and tell us that he will lead us to any promised land; the earth is our promised land and we are going to take some of it."

Nothing more specific about the location of this land or the means of acquiring it is ever offered. Muslim spokesmen parry questions on these points by referring doubters to Elijah Muhammad or by affirming that Allah is destroying the white race and will reward the black in His own way. This vagueness and the frequent reiteration that Muslims are going to somehow

"take" or "get" this land—along with their emphasis on self-defense and their creation of an unarmed but paramilitary group called the Fruit of Islam—has led to the accusation that they believe in violence to achieve their goals. The relation of the Muslims to violence is one of the most confusing aspects of a movement that the public does not understand in general.

To the outsider the Muslims seem to have an aura of violence at a time when so many Negro movements are emphasizing non-violent techniques of protest. The Muslims hurl strong epithets at whites from within a movement whose inner nature is revealed only to its believers. Their orators stir up sizable audiences with predictions of the calamities that are about to fall upon white civilization. They frequently point out that everyone has the right to self-defense and that they reject non-violence as a technique. Malcolm X has told an open meeting, "Our religion does not teach us to turn the other cheek. Islam teaches us to defend ourselves." On a television broadcast he once said in derision of non-violence: "America itself is opposed to passive resistance. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, America didn't resort to passive resistance." At their meetings the Muslims always show how closely they control the proceedings by ready power. Describing the first press conference held by Elijah Muhammad several years ago in Los Angeles, the Muslims' official newspaper reported: "Several well-groomed young men, serious-faced, and very athletic in appearance, circulated among the newsmen during the conference and kept the fifty-five reporters, photographers, and newsreel men aware of the 'seriousness' of the occasion." Anyone who has seen these athletic-looking young men in the Fruit of Islam can well believe it.

At the same time the Muslims take great pains to show that they are peaceful in intent and carry no weapons. They search for weapons all those who enter their religious services and other indoor meetings. When a speaker edges near the question of force, he usually adds that Islam teaches peace. One of Elijah Muhammad's sons has asserted that many of the men in the Fruit of Islam are former fighters and army judo experts, but he hastened to add that "Judo and boxing, however, are never relied on by any Muslim as a defense. . . . We rely on Allah with complete confidence as our defense."

Why, then, the Fruit of Islam? This is a kind of elite corps of the most emotionally committed and physically fit members of the Nation of Islam. The avowed purpose of the training program that produces them is to create healthy minds and bodies among the faithful, but these vigorous young men appear to serve several functions. They act as bodyguards for the leaders of the movement, protecting them equally from irate whites and from rival cults. They impart a crisply efficient tone to the religious ceremonies that exalts the leaders. And they serve to impress Negro communities with the massed and ready power of the Muslims; they might even constitute, one day, a kind of internal police force within these communities, where they would fill the vacuum created by the willingness of the police in many cities to leave Negro districts to their own vice and crime so long as they do not spill over into the white areas. Finally, the Fruit

of Islam shows, from the Muslim point of view, what can be accomplished through faith, clean living, and the avoidance of the bad food the "so-called Negro" loves.

Although the Muslims seem ready for it, they have seldom been involved in physical violence, and then only when they were personally attacked or believed their legal rights to be infringed upon, as has happened in Los Angeles, Rochester, and Louisiana. In any case they appear less concerned with the violence inflicted on Negroes during civil-rights demonstrations than with the ordinary violence that Negroes suffer in their unpublicized day-to-day encounters with white law-enforcement authorities; perhaps most of all they are concerned with the violence Negroes encounter from other Negroes. They seem to believe that a *capacity* for violence in self-defense will reduce the need for it. The systematic *use* of violence, however, can only lead to defeat of the Negro minority under present conditions. Thus most Negro groups adopt non-violence not only out of belief but also out of a realistic appraisal of the present balance of power. Whether the Muslims look forward to a time when violence can be a reasonably calculated risk is difficult to tell. I believe that their intense desire to display self-control, to obey the law, and to controvert every feature of the white stereotype of the Negro reduces the likelihood that they will deliberately resort to violence.

Although their present position on violence is a difficult one to maintain, the Muslims have managed it well. I saw them display a combination of readiness and restraint in a moment of tension last spring at an indoor meeting sponsored by the Newark Commission on Human Rights. The Muslim leader who was speaking addressed a packed, uncomfortably warm roomful of Negroes and whites. As he answered written questions from the audience, a white man walked up to him and said, "I want to ask a question." Instantly five or six well-groomed young men of the Fruit of Islam leaped forward and surrounded their leader. The chairman told the white man he was out of order and would have to go back and write out his question. But he remained among the tense bodyguards, some of whom, in their eagerness to keep him off, had their elbows up and were brushing against him. He pulled back and said quietly but nervously, "Don't touch me, now." The Muslims dropped their arms to their sides with military precision and stood their ground. By this time several plain-clothes men had come forward, and they led the man away. The Fruit of Islam returned to their posts in the audience.

Just as the Muslims remain untested in their capacity to answer violence with violence, so they remain untested regarding other forms of power. They give out no information on the number of their members, except to say that it is large and growing larger. They do not support political parties or individual candidates, and their position on legislation is one of indifference to all of it as useless. They do not engage in negotiations with the white community—or what is the same thing to them, the governmental authorities—on desegregation, housing, schools, jobs, and so on. Their appearance of power, indeed, may depend precisely on their ability to avoid any open test of it.

In a sense, any measurement of power is irrelevant in a movement like the Nation of Islam. Such a religious group must be judged, rather, on what it does for its individual members and on the example it sets for others. From all the evidence, the Muslims have a great effect upon those who are deeply committed. As the leaders point out, their members are law-abiding, self-respecting, hard-working, and moral. Many of them have reached this condition despite an inhospitable environment, and some despite earlier criminal careers and time in prison (where, indeed, many Negroes first come into close contact with the teachings of Elijah Muhammad). The example they set in their personal lives and in their devotion to the Nation of Islam is difficult to follow, but it is not lost on the people who see it. Indeed, it is their effect upon others that may be the most significant fact about the Muslims. Although they are not really participating in the struggle for civil rights, they affect it in interesting ways. They probably arouse a certain amount of grassroots ardor that makes itself felt in other Negro organizations. The Muslims showed their own awareness of this effect when they reported that the police of Monroe, Louisiana, had entered their mosque because the whites feared that "the teachings of the Muslims were feeding the Negroes' discontent, making them impatient, removing their fear of the white man, and nourishing their long dormant characteristics." Then, the great interest shown in the Muslims by the press, radio, and television may well have encouraged the leaders of the civil-rights groups to take a more militant stance themselves. The "extreme" language of the Muslims seems to make the white community more amenable to negotiate with the "moderates," and this willingness itself encourages the Negroes' representatives to raise their bids.

The direct impact of the Nation of Islam upon the Negroes of America is difficult to assess. Their numerical strength is usually estimated by outside observers at one to two hundred thousand, but I doubt that they have more than fifty thousand really committed followers at any one time, although undoubtedly many more than this number have passed through the movement and are perhaps still on its fringes. But if Negroes are not rushing to join the Muslims, they do seem to respect them; those Negroes who do not join the Muslims do not join in criticism of them.

For all this, however, the bulk of the Negroes appear indifferent to the Nation of Islam as a religion, nor can they see in it any real solution to their problems. It is the Negro who feels there *is* no solution in negotiation, in legislation, and in the "rational" approaches of the civil-rights groups who is ripe for the Muslims. Although the Muslims hold out no hope for a solution in the conventional sense—that is, integration or at least desegregation—they do provide a solution for the individual who can find in this religion and attitude a way of adapting himself to a society that excludes him. The decision to eschew all contact with the white world removes from a Negro the heavy burden of trying to wrest equal rights from people unwilling to grant them. "Stop forcing yourself into places where you are not wanted," reads the third of Elijah Muhammad's "Twelve Point Program." The eighth rule states: "Do not seek to mix

your blood through racial integration." This must be balm to all Negroes at some time or other.

The movement also provides for many Negroes a means by which they can both release and control their feelings toward a hostile white society. The ritual, the fierce verbal attacks upon whites, and the display of strength all give a sense of power and adventure that easily siphons off delinquent tendencies. They remain completely within the Negro ghettos, except for the few spokesmen they occasionally send outside. From this familiar ground, they hurl their imprecations, insults, and vague threats at the distant white world, as they stand surrounded by friendly black listeners, who are surrounded by the Fruit of Islam, who are in turn surrounded by the white police. Yet the movement's obedience of the law and its insistence that Negroes stay among themselves give a sense of security and even tranquility.

The militance of the Muslims is not political, for all their rejection of white American society. It is messianic and apocalyptic—that is, religious. Even such a presumably political goal as the carving of a separate state for Negroes is given a religious turn. Asked on a television broadcast about this "political" goal, Malcolm X replied: "Still, that's religion with us, just as it was religion for Moses . . . to separate the slaves in that day from the slavemaster of that day. . . . The Christians and Jews both today regard Moses not as a politician but as a religious leader."

Despite his profession of Islam, Elijah Muhammad obviously regards himself more as a Moses than a Prophet Muhammad. The Islam he preaches is for American Negroes alone. The religious ideas of the Nation of Islam, he told me, were given to him personally by W. D. Fard; that is, by God, or Allah.

These ideas are nowhere systematically stated for the public, though the initiated have been given a few publications and manuscripts containing them. Many of these teachings, as expressed in published articles by Elijah Muhammad and in an interview he gave me in his richly furnished Chicago house last summer, are bewildering and difficult to clarify for nonbelievers.

Mr. Elijah Muhammad told me that the Nation of Islam believes in a succession of Gods who followed the first Black God, the Supreme Being who created the universe seventy-six trillion years ago. He has had successors, but no equal. W. D. Fard is the latest God, or Allah, and Elijah Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. Elijah Muhammad knew Fard intimately in Detroit from 1930 to 1934 and learned about Islam from him. Mr. Fard's coming was the realization of two prophecies: the Christian prophecy of the second coming of Jesus, and the Koranic prophecy of the coming of the Mahdi. Elijah Muhammad thus asserts: "I was in the presence of God for over three years, and I received what I am teaching you directly from His mouth." And: "I believe I am the first man . . . who has been commissioned by the face of God, in person. If I am lying, I will give you ten thousand dollars." This notion contradicts traditional Islam, which believes in one God for all time and in only one Messenger of God, Muhammad, born in Arabia in the seventh century.

Sixty-six trillion years ago, Elijah Muhammad told me, the moon separated from the earth. Then came the black race of

men and women, the original and first human beings, whose religion was Islam, and who founded the holy city of Mecca. Among them, many millenniums in the past, were twenty-four wise scientists with great knowledge and power. Fifty-thousand years ago one such scientist disagreed with the others and created a special tribe of blacks, a "hard and strong people" who were to conquer the jungles of East Asia and to pacify the people there. This was the tribe of Shabazz, from which the Negroes in the United States are descended; they are the "lost-found Nation of Islam in the wilderness of North America." About sixty-six hundred years ago the God of that time was one Mr. Yakub, who knew how to breed races in a scientific way. He was born twenty miles from Mecca at a time when 70 per cent of the people were satisfied and 30 per cent dissatisfied. As the embodiment of evil, Elijah Muhammad has written, Mr. Yakub "was naturally born out of the 30 per cent dissatisfied." Moreover, he was "born to make trouble, break peace, kill." He was highly educated. "He began school at the age of four," according to the Messenger. "He had an unusual size head. When he had grown up, the others referred to him as the 'big head scientist.'" At eighteen, Yakub "had finished all the colleges and universities of his nation, and was seen preaching on the streets of Mecca, making converts."

Teaching Islam, Yakub became a source of concern to the authorities, who imprisoned him and his followers and exiled them to the island of Patmos. This is the island where John is supposed to have received the message contained in Revelation in the New Testament; it is possible, Elijah Muhammad told me, that Yakub and John were the same man. As an enemy of Allah, Yakub decided to create a new race of white people, though he himself was black. But he could not create white directly out of black, only in several stages. Out of the black race he created first a brown race, which took him two hundred years, after which he had no more black material for his work. It took him two more centuries to create the red race out of the brown, after which he had no more brown material. He took a similar period to create the yellow race from the red, and then had no more red material. Finally, after two more centuries—that is, about six thousand years ago—he created the white race out of the yellow. This white race was completely different from the others, for it was the first that had no black stuff at all and the first that was not Muslim by nature.

The whites were a race of devils, according to Elijah Muhammad: savages, nude and shameless, hairy, animal-like, walking on all fours, and living in trees. After two thousand years Allah raised up Moses to civilize this white race, to make them the rulers of the world that Yakub had intended them to be. Moses taught them that on Fridays they must eat fish instead of meat, a practice many whites retain to this day. But even Moses found his task difficult. Yakub's white race was destined to rule for six thousand years—down to our own time. Then the "original black nation would give birth to one whose wisdom, knowledge, and power would be infinite." This "greatest and mightiest God," who appeared on earth as W. D. Fard, would destroy

Yakub's entire world and restore the black people to their rightful place as rulers of the universe. Earlier, Allah had willed that some blacks should be brought as slaves to North America in order that they should understand and know themselves better. They were to remain slaves for four hundred years ending in 1955. This history and prophecy are now coming to realization as the black people rise all over the world and as Allah condemns white civilization to self-destruction. Under black rule, the earth itself becomes heaven instead of hell, for Allah "has made it clear what constitutes heaven on earth: Freedom, Justice, Equality; money, good homes, and friendship in all walks of life."

This pragmatic mixture of traditional Islam, Judaism, and Christianity is designed to encourage pride in blackness. It most closely resembles the ideas and flavor of Ismaili and Druze doctrines, two medieval heretical sects in Islam, especially in these respects: secrecy, revelation of the doctrine only to initiates and then in stages, belief in a succession of incarnations of God, cycles of history, and great emphasis upon the coming of a savior. The black Muslims also share, with Druzes and Ismailis (who still survive in the Middle East and India), an interest in the occult sciences and the magic of numbers. Each of these features is found in other religions, too, especially in medieval ones (and Masonic groups); yet the particular combination accepted by the black Muslims suggests that W. D. Fard, or the man who taught him, was himself a Druze or Ismaili. When he was collecting followers in Detroit in the early 1930's, there were hundreds of Druzes there who had come from Syria. Yet, whatever the national or religious origin of Mr. Fard, his racial character has an interesting explanation. Mr. Elijah Muhammad has told me that Mr. Fard was not a black man but only half black and half white. He was made this way to enable him to be accepted by the black people in America and to lead them, while at the same time enabling him to move undiscovered among the white people so that he could understand and judge the enemy of the blacks. (Incidentally, the name "Fard" is also a word in Arabic. Its literal meaning is "the one who has no like," the unique one, and by extension it is generally taken to mean Allah.)

A "Take all this Christianity stuff . . . and put it in their garbage pail"

As a Muslim, Mr. Elijah Muhammad does not entirely reject the Old and New Testaments. He regards the Bible as a store of both usable and unusable conceptions, stories, myths, parables, and ethical ideas, although he does not hesitate to criticize the Bible on the ground, rather surprising in his case, that it is irrational. Concerning the statement in Genesis that the earth was formless and the spirit of God moved upon the waters, he asks:

"What was the water on, since there was no form of earth? As I see it, the Bible is very questionable." As for the New Testament, in which most of the black Muslims were reared, they know it better than the Old, or than the Koran. Although most of their allusions are to it rather than to the other scriptures, this has not deterred them from vehemently rejecting Christianity. "Take all this Christianity stuff they have given to us," Elijah Muhammad advised in a major speech in Chicago several years ago, "and put it in their garbage pail and take the garbage pail and start fighting like hell with it!"

The Nation of Islam is sometimes ambivalent, but usually hostile, toward Judaism. The most profound identification Elijah Muhammad makes, as I have mentioned, is with Moses rather than with Jesus or the Prophet Muhammad. (In fact, he disputes the traditional Islamic belief that the historical Muhammad was the prophet God raised up in answer to Abraham's prayer, or the one He promised Moses that He would send forth; he implies that Muhammad cannot compare with Moses in importance.) He stresses his mission to lead the so-called American Negroes out of the "wilderness of North America," as Moses led the Israelites out of the wilderness. The implied resemblance between Elijah Muhammad teaching Islam to former slaves in a Christian country today and Moses teaching Judaism to slaves in Pharaonic Egypt thousands of years ago is quite clear. The Negroes' own identification with the Children of Israel is apparently so powerful that it persists in full strength in the doctrines of the Nation of Islam. Black Muslims seem also to feel some sort of kinship with Jews in their common rejection of certain foods. The window of the Muslim-owned Shabazz Quality Market in Washington, D.C., has the sign KOSHER. A caption for a picture of the Muslims' Harlem restaurant in an official publication states: "New York's many Black Jews find Temple No. 7 Restaurant the one Harlem eatery where they can be certain of getting 'strictly kosher' food."

But the Jews have three drawbacks. First, they are white. "They are not so instrumental," Elijah Muhammad tells his followers, "in trying to lynch and kill you. . . . But they are all . . . members of the same race of devils." Second, Jews are numerous among the landlords and shopkeepers in several Negro ghettos and are thus a target the Muslims often single out for special attack. Finally, the Jews in Israel are opposed by Arabs and Muslims around them, and so leaders of the black Muslims here occasionally criticize them. After a visit to the Near East one of Elijah Muhammad's sons wrote: "I sympathize with my Muslim brothers there for the loss of some of their lands to the Jews. May Allah send plagues and painful death to them. However, after a closer observation, I believe that the time of the Arab conquest is very near."

Such expressions of solidarity with the Muslim world of Asia and North Africa are often made in religious terms, too, by the black Muslims. They are sensitive to the frequent criticism that they are not recognized by orthodox Muslims elsewhere or by those "legitimate" Muslims who have emigrated to America and maintain their traditional religious beliefs and practices.

In 1959 Elijah Muhammad toured Africa and the Near East with a few of his followers and reported that he had made a regular pilgrimage to Mecca, a claim that others have ridiculed. His son Akbar was full of enthusiasm for the reception the black Muslims got in Muslim lands. "You will be surprised," he informed the faithful, "to see how your Muslim brothers receive you in their countries."

Elijah Muhammad has written letters to and received replies from the heads of several states, including Ghana and Egypt. From time to time individual Muslims from the Near and Middle East have been associated with the Nation of Islam as teachers or informal advisers, and it has been charged that the movement has in some way been connected also with the governments of one or more Muslim countries. If there have been any such relations, however, they have probably not been very serious or firm; it is clear that Elijah Muhammad directs his movement exclusively for American Negroes and that he does not permit anyone else, in this country or any other, to have a hand in running it. Recently, for example, when it was pointed out to him that an "orthodox" Muslim authority in Saudi Arabia had criticized his doctrines, he answered that if this was true, it was irrelevant. "There is no Muslim in Arabia," he asserted, "that has the authority to stop me from delivering this message that I have been assigned to by Allah, any more than they had authority to stop Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad."

In their primary and secondary schools the Muslims try to teach the Arabic language and Islamic doctrine, though not with much apparent success. The Muslims have also published a first-grade reader prepared by Sister Christina Johnson, director of their Chicago school. The first lesson, called "The Muslims," reads: "I am Roche Muhammad. I am Linda Denise IX. We are Muslims of America. This is the story of our Nation." Later lessons, like public-school textbooks about Dick and Jane, carry the two girls through everyday experiences. One entitled "Our Kitchen" reads: "This is our Kitchen. See how clean it is! Sister Gladys is the Cook. She cooks good, good food. She does not cook pork. Muslims do not eat pork. Pork is poison food. We like our Sister Gladys."

Some of the Muslim leaders have become rather well-read, for they are constantly seeking scientific and historical evidence to confirm their claims regarding black greatness and white devilry. A short article in their newspaper, for example, reported a tour of the Museum of Natural History in New York as part of an "educational series designed to acquaint followers of Islam with their natural history and origin." A Museum reconstruction of "original man" was found to bear a "remarkable likeness to Africans and Afro-Americans." The Muslim spokesmen seem to make special efforts to show that they are aware of everything that might be of interest to the movement. Their communications system is excellent, as one learns from attending their meetings and visiting their establishments. On one occasion in Chicago they knew exactly where I had been for a whole evening, whom I had talked with and in what language; they let me know this when I visited the University of Islam less than twenty-four

hours later. Accustomed to and tired of being deceived by the whites' "tricknology," the Muslims have carefully developed and perfected their own manipulative arts in the conduct of their meetings, the themes they stress in their publications and, to use the language of public relations, the "image they project" of the movement both among Negroes and whites.

E Cultivating the image
with science, myth
— and good public relations

Elijah Muhammad is always referred to as gentle and soft-spoken; the Fruit of Islam as courteous, athletic, and disciplined; the Muslim women as beautiful, chaste, and capable; the Muslim gatherings as orderly and peaceful. The Muslims have engaged the services of a Negro firm of professional public-relations counselors. They like to stress the attention police and other officials give to Muslim leaders. When Elijah Muhammad arrived in New York recently to give a speech, the Muslim paper reported that he and his party "were met and escorted by a contingent of 150 detectives of the police department and the Port of New York Authority. . . . Police officers in blue uniforms snapped to attention as Mr. Muhammad walked down the cleared airline terminal corridor." Such reports are bound to impress Negroes who chafe at police indifference or brutality. Sometimes the language in their newspaper smacks more of the clichés of publicity releases than of fervid social protest, as in a story about the success of the Muslim musical drama "Orgena" ("A Negro" spelled backwards): "Heading the star-studded cast of half a hundred. . . ." Another issue carried an interview, favorable in tone, with Dr. Ernest Dichter, president of the Institute of Motivational Research. The writer began with the question: "If a widely used Scientific process can unmask man's inner motivations and help to alter the pattern of human desires, why can't such a process be used by the United States Government to wipe out prejudice in America?" Dr. Dichter's response was: "It can." His institute, the article points out, "is headquartered in a castle-like mansion . . . Top business firms have engaged the organization . . . Many have achieved happy results."

The Muslims do not hesitate to use "white" science to their own advantage and to further their conception of the Negro's benefit. Elijah Muhammad once berated Negroes for resorting to the white man for support. "Must you always," he demanded, "quote a white man for that clever or wise thing to say? When have you heard a white man quote a black man in his outlook on life? Begin now by quoting a man from among your own people." But that very issue of *Muhammad Speaks* quoted *Time*, *U.S. News & World Report*, and *Reader's Digest*.

This respect for the printed word is doubtless a reaction to the denial of learning to Negroes for centuries and to the common

notion that they have little capacity to learn. W. E. B. Du Bois refers to the "longing to know" among the newly emancipated slaves of a century ago, to their "curiosity, born of compulsory ignorance, to know and test the power of the cabalistic letters of the white man. . . ." According to Elijah Muhammad, long before black men were enslaved they had already "mastered mathematics, astronomy, and other basic sciences of life." Mathematics is a fundamental science, he believes, and numbers enthrall him. In an article on the original man as black, Elijah Muhammad wrote: "We make such history once every twenty-five thousand years. When such history is written, it is done by twenty-four of our scientists. . . . There is a significance to the number 24 Scientists and the 25,000 years." The significance, he pointed out, is that there are twenty-four hours in the day and approximately twenty-five thousand miles in the circumference of the earth. A young professor of mathematics in a Negro college, who became an active Muslim after hearing Elijah Muhammad preach, recently told me: "Mathematics and Islam are equal. They are the same thing. This is an equation." He pointed out that whites, especially in the South, tell the Negro that science is far beyond his comprehension. "Mathematics," he said, "is the key to the world, and that's why the whites have tried to withhold it from the so-called Negro."

Science, language, numbers, and myth are combined in the cosmology and practical rules for living set down by Elijah Muhammad. He told an audience this story: "Don't be afraid of threats to destroy the world with the hydrogen bomb. It is impossible to kill all mankind. Allah told me that one of our wise black scientists got angry sixty-six trillion years ago and wanted to destroy everybody because he could not make everyone speak the same language. He dug a shaft in the center of the heart of this planet, filled it with explosives, and set it off thinking he was going to get rid of all of us. He only blew it into parts; the part you call the moon was blown away and dropped all the water on this side."

When Elijah Muhammad tells his followers what and how to eat, there is something in his instructions reminiscent of Noble Drew Ali. "Stop eating yourself to death," he scolds, "by eating three or four meals a day. Eat one meal a day, and eat the best foods." He also warns against eating from cans and wax cartons. And the Muslim newspaper warns that "Penalties are exacted from Muslims found overweight." It also points out that "white scientists" have studied Elijah Muhammad's teachings on diet and weight. "Finally," the paper remarks, "in October of 1959, actuaries released new average weight charts for men and women. It was no mere coincidence that their findings coincided with what Messenger Muhammad had been teaching."

As part of their rebirth, the followers of Elijah Muhammad drop the old Anglo-Saxon names given their ancestors by American slavemasters and adopt new ones. The Messenger himself, he told me, was originally called Elijah Poole. The most common practice is for the convert to replace his "slave" surname with a simple X. Malcolm X, whose present full name is Malcolm El Shabazz, was originally Malcolm Little. Where

there are several persons with the same given name, the X is preceded by a different number for each, as in James 2X and James 3X. Malcolm X once explained this practice by rhetorically asking a Muslim audience: "Why should we Africans carry our slavemasters' names? Did you ever see a European white man calling himself Kasavubu?" Their insistence on spelling it "Muslim," rather than "Moslem," is also invested with a special, though unclear, significance. One of Elijah Muhammad's sons defends this preference by saying: "Just as a Christian would dislike being called a 'Chrastian,' Muslims dislike being called 'Moslems.'" (The Messenger himself, however, has told me that there is no significant difference between the two terms and that "Moslem" is not offensive to him.)

We need not look far to find out why some Negroes have adopted Islam as a religion or a vehicle to express their sense of outrage against whites or Christianity. Religion is often mixed with social protest, of course, and various religions (established and humble) have had special appeals to the alienated and the disinherited. Religion, especially in America, is a convenient protective device for a group seeking radical change. Religious groups have many privileges and freedoms denied to purely secular groups. Americans seem to be less apprehensive when social goals are expressed in the language of religion, as they are nowadays not only by the Muslims but by other Negro leaders and organizations as well. The growth of Negro education in the South before and after the Civil War owed much to the religious impulses of the donors, the beneficiaries, and the fund-raisers. Though a restraining influence in some ways, the segregated Negro church has been a leading force in the struggle for equality, since it has enabled Negroes to meet with reasonable freedom and privacy and to develop their own strategies and capacities.

Islam offered special attractions to the Negro who, dissatisfied with Christianity, was nevertheless profoundly religious—attractions more enduring than sheer exoticism, ritual, and display. For American Negroes, Islam has had no connection with slavery; slavemasters and the religious apologists for slavery here were—nominally, at least—always Christians. Islam for centuries fought Christianity, regarded as the white man's religion, and triumphed over it for long periods of time in Asia, Africa, and even in Europe. Arabs and Muslims are popularly thought of as fearless, powerful warriors, spreading their religion by the sword. A different order of attraction exerted by Islam is its exaltation of the male as head of the family. Negro life in America, during and after slavery, has denigrated the male. He has been unable to carry out fully his accepted role as the family provider and the protector of his women and children. White men had easy access to Negro women, while the entire authority of governmental and private power was arrayed to prevent Negro men from approaching white women. Through sexual attraction Negro women were always closer to the source of power, the white man, while American ideas about what constitutes suitable occupations for women—even colored—often put them in a better position than their husbands to obtain less

demeaning employment. Islamic doctrine, conveniently, stresses not only the stern obligations of the male but also his greater privileges and higher status. Curiously enough, therefore, the conditions of American life have made some Negroes feel that an exotic religion enables them to come closer to the middle-class norm of American family life.

That the black Muslims are aware of this attraction held out by Islamic doctrine and practice is abundantly revealed in their publications. Last summer Malcolm X said to a newspaper-woman who was interviewing his wife: "Slavery robbed the Negro man of his masculinity. The American Negro female has been more bold and domineering, since she had to be. Her earning power generally has been greater than that of the man, as has her educational level. But a woman must be taught her role. And the man must be sufficiently equipped to create an income for the family, to be given more respect and so respect himself." A picture of a Muslim family in an official publication carries the caption: "Father always sits at the head of the table. The Muslim father is greatly respected and obeyed by his wife and children. The Messenger insists that the Muslim father must also fulfill his role as family provider and protector." Black women, Elijah Muhammad says, must be natural and chaste; they must shun hair straighteners, make-up, and revealing clothing, and must not go to beaches and pools with men. "Our woman," he admonished the men at a Muslim convention several years ago, "fills herself and you with social diseases of the white race. . . . It is YOU MEN who are to blame, not women." To the women he has said: "Stop posing for indecent pictures to be published in the newspapers. . . . The first step taken by a civilized man in civilizing a savage is to teach them how to wear clothes, have a sense of shyness."



You want separation?
ask the Muslims.
Very well — but make it complete

Does all this add up to a religion at all, and to anything resembling what the world has traditionally known as Islam? Islam does not have a central authority with the power to admit and exclude applicants. Anyone who accepts Islamic doctrine and tries to perform certain prescribed rituals has the right to call himself a Muslim. Whether the followers of Elijah Muhammad are "orthodox," or "good," Muslims is, practically speaking, irrelevant. Some Muslim sects are hardly willing to regard others as co-religionists, while to many Asian or Near Eastern Muslims, the Islam of African tribes converted centuries ago is still something strange. Yet all are Muslims. The most serious charge against the black Muslims is their exclusiveness, for traditional Islam does not exclude races, colors, or nations — indeed, that is one reason why Elijah Muhammad and his followers are attracted to it. They are not perturbed by this contra-

diction, however, and persist in regarding *their* Islam as exclusively for American "so-called Negroes."

Does Elijah Muhammad, or Malcolm X, it is often asked, "really" believe in the Messenger's cosmology and natural history? I see no reason to doubt it. Do Christians, Jews, and Muslims believe in the cosmology of the Bible and the Koran? One may argue that Elijah Muhammad is "sick" if he thinks he is in communication with God. So, then, has been any previous religious leader from the point of view of nonbelievers. Elijah Muhammad is on no shakier ground than anyone else who ever claimed to hear God. It is true that much of what he says is incomprehensible, but so is much of the Bible and Koran; a few millenniums of exegesis by powerful minds may do for his confusions what it has done for other religions. True, his Islam has smaller ethical and universal content than other religions, but that does not make it any the less a religion.

The future of the black Muslims is closely tied to their religious appeal and, of course, to the realities of Negro life. I do not think they can grow much larger, because they must retain their religious character in order to be distinctive, and it is precisely this religious character that puts people off in a secular age. The Muslims will probably face a serious crisis when the time comes to find a successor to Elijah Muhammad. How will the newcomer's status be defined? Will the movement become more active politically? How can it get beyond the position of a small, narrow cult that is cohesive only because it requires so much of its adherents?

I am assuming, of course, that Elijah Muhammad's religion will not become *the* religion of American Negroes. I believe that the age of world-conquering religious movements is over, yet I believe also that the black Muslims have set in motion the kind of ideological wave which, *in the past*, has engulfed worlds. Such ideas have spread, as did Christianity and Islam themselves, through cultures alien to the ones of their origin. But there are many examples of failure, and even success has been riddled with failure. The Muslims of Arabia, for example, failed to convert the Jews, and the Christians have failed to convert the Muslims. If a religion succeeds, it is a great spiritual revival revealing divine purpose. If it fails, it is a "cult" to provide amusement for the nonbeliever. The black Muslims provide one mode of adjustment for the Negro to a difficult life. The white world has said he is no longer an African, but has refused to allow him to become a full American. The white world has belittled the Negro's past and denied him a proud future. The Muslims have retorted by saying: let us separate completely and forever.

It is a kind of tragedy in a world where all the races are becoming, whether in enmity or brotherhood, not less, but more dependent one upon another.

Morroe Berger, Professor of Sociology at Princeton, has written a number of articles and books on United States race relations and Islam. This article was prepared from a larger study, supported in part by the National Institute of Mental Health.