

Nation of Islam

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Introduction

In 1930 the mysterious Wali Fard Muhammad arrived in Detroit and began preaching to African Americans that the 'black man,' the 'so-called Negro,' must return to his original religion, Islam, his original language, Arabic, and the law of Allah. He spoke of himself as the Prophet and eventually introduced himself as the Son of Man, perhaps due to the influence of his most ardent follower, Elijah Poole, later renamed Elijah Muhammad (1897-1975). At least some of his contemporary followers, including Elijah Muhammad, came to think of Fard Muhammad as God (or Allah) in human form. His mysterious disappearance in 1934 left the growing movement in turmoil. Initially, Elijah Muhammad was just one of several competing leaders of the embryonic movement known as the Nation of Islam. By the time of his death in 1975, Elijah Muhammad led a movement that may have numbered a few hundred thousand, making him the most powerful Muslim in the United States of America. Even before his death he was overshadowed by the growing reputation of Malcolm X (1925-1965), and after his death by the activities of Louis Farrakhan and his own son, Warith Deen Mohammed (formerly known as Wallace D. Muhammad) (1933-2008). And although Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad's son came to reject his idiosyncratic and racial formulation of Islam, Elijah Muhammad was responsible for bringing them and hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions, of African Americans to Islam. Part of his appeal, no doubt, was his prediction that the evil and racist rule of Whites would soon come to an apocalyptic end.

For Elijah Muhammad the accounts of the creation of the white race of devils a few millennia ago and their impending destruction during these last days were the primary value of the Qur'an and the Bible. In 1957 Elijah Muhammad wrote in his newspaper column "Mr. Muhammad Speaks" that Allah in the person of Master Fard Muhammad, the Mahdi, the Messiah, came from Mecca to Detroit in 1930 in fulfilment of the prophecies 'to resurrect the mentally dead, lost members (so-called Negroes) of the Tribe of Shabazz' and to initiate the end of the rule of the devil (Muhammad 1957a). The first of these tasks involved teaching Blacks the true history of the world and their true religion of Islam, so that they could escape Hell, which is the world of the Whites, and enter Heaven, which is now, here on earth; there is no life beyond the grave in which one can hope for justice, freedom, and equality, just as there is no 'spook' god—to use Elijah Muhammad's term for a non-corporeal God. Allah's second task involved the coming war of Armageddon, in which Allah will first punish America with the weapons of nature: floods, drought, hailstorms, fire, earthquakes, and so forth. Only complete territorial separation of the races would protect the black

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Muslims from this destruction of white America. Later, Allah would destroy England and the United States using a spaceship known as the Mother Plane.

The Nation of Islam under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad had two apocalyptic themes. First, he urged the radical transformation of religious, social, economic, and political order for African Americans through their return to his racialist form of Islam, their complete separation (not segregation) from Whites. Second, he <u>prophesied</u> the destruction of the white race, particularly the Whites of the United States but more broadly white global hegemony, by Allah in the person of Wali Fard Muhammad and his 'Mother Plane.' With the earth once again free of the evil of the white race—which had been bred a little of six thousand years ago out of the original black humanity—justice, freedom, and equality would return to the world forever.

Origins and Teachings of the Nation of Islam

The Nation of Islam (originally the Allah Temple of Islam) began in 1930 in Detroit with the appearance of a man claiming to be from Mecca and known variously as Master W. F. Muhammad (also Mohammed), Wali Fard (pronounced Farrad) Muhammad, and Allah (b. 1877). His origins are much disputed, but the Federal Bureau of Investigation asserted that he was the petty criminal Wallace D. Ford (b. 1891?), though Elijah Muhammad vehemently denied this allegation. Fard Muhammad taught his followers a racialist formulation of Islam later elaborated by Elijah Muhammad: Islam was the original innate religion of all people of colour, especially Blacks. White humanity had been 'grafted' out of the original black humanity relatively recently; they were devils, whose greatest evil was the enslavement of Africans, who thus became the Lost-Found Nation of Islam (in the wilderness of America). The only hope for peace, equality, and justice for the descendants of these slaves lay in the separation from Whites and their wicked Christian religion in preparation for their imminent destruction at the hands of Allah in the person of Fard Muhammad.

After Fard Muhammad's mysterious disappearance in 1934, the movement of several thousand fractured, but eventually Elijah Muhammad came to be seen as the sole leader. After itinerant preaching in the cities of the northeast United States and a prison sentence for evading the draft during World War II, Elijah Muhammad saw his efforts rewarded with a rapid expansion of his movement, especially with the efforts of his protégé, Malcolm X. The Nation of Islam weathered the storm of Malcolm X's departure from the Nation of Islam in 1964, and Elijah Muhammad continued to lead the movement during the turbulent late 1960s and early 1970s. After his death, he was succeeded by his son, Warith Deen Mohammed (then known as Wallace D. Muhammad), who had been expelled several times for his Sunni Islam inclinations. Soon after assuming leadership, he moved the Nation of Islam towards Sunni orthodoxy. By 1977 some conservatives led by Louis Farrakhan 'resurrected' the Nation of Islam with its original doctrines including teaching about an impending apocalypse.

The birth of the Nation of Islam in the twentieth-century United States, however, is really only the beginning of the end times. According to Elijah Muhammad's various books and columns, their history began sixty-six trillion years ago when God or Allah, having failed to unite people in one language, decided to destroy the planet by blasting it in two—resulting in the earth as it is today and the moon. The Asiatic black tribe of Shabazz survived the division of the planet and settled in the Nile Valley and Mecca. They produced great civilisations, but just over 6,600 years ago the evil genius Mr. Yakub was born in Mecca.

Although he was from the Black Nation himself, Mr. Yakub began converting people by promising luxuries. His success eventually caused enough concern in Mecca that he and his 59,999 followers left for the island of Pelan in the Aegean Sea. Having earlier discovered the secrets of selective breeding, the now embittered Mr. Yakub set up a six-hundred-year eugenics programme to breed an increasingly whiter and more evil people. When the evil genius had been merely six years old, he had already discovered that opposites attract while playing with pieces of steel. He vowed to his uncle 'when I get to be an old man, I am going to make a man and he will rule you' (Muhammad 1967, 3; 1970, 16-17). Therefore, he had to make his new people 'unalike': pale-skinned and blue-eyed. He did so by separating the 'black germ and brown germ' within the black man's sperm and only allowing the brown babies to live. He continued in this manner, making progressively lighter people until he was able to achieve the unalike features he required. After the six hundred years, the newly created Whites returned to Mecca and soon managed to turn the Black Nation against itself. As a result, the Whites were driven at gunpoint to Europe. Moses was sent by Allah two thousand years later to try to civilise these hairy, naked, cave-dwelling, tree-climbing savages. Jesus and Muhammad also tried to convert these white devils. They failed; even Muhammad merely delayed for one thousand years their escape from their European prison, for it had been prophesied that the white race would rule the world for six thousand years and enslave black people in the Americas until the coming of Fard Muhammad to mentally resurrect the Lost-Found Nation of Islam (Sahib 1951, 152-53; Muhammad 1992 [1965], 112-21).

The period of six thousand years during which the white race was permitted by Allah to rule the world was a time of war and destruction. They used their 'tricknology' to spread their wickedness over the whole earth (Muhammad 1974b). Their greatest crimes were the invasion of America, the stealing of the land of the Native Indians, and especially the capture and enslavement of Africans. For three hundred years these slaves were robbed of their religion, language, and even their names, and they were forced to work and shed their blood for a nation that repaid them with hatred.

Elijah Muhammad supported many parts of this race myth with scriptural references. According to him, that white people were created by the original black people is demonstrated by the use of the first-person plural pronouns 'we' and 'us' in both the quranic and the biblical accounts of creation (Muhammad 1992 [1965], 128). Thus, in the phrase 'Let us make man in our image,' of Genesis 1:26, the 'us' refers to the 59,999 'black men and women making or grafting them into the likeness or image of the original man' (Muhammad 1992 [1965], 118). The Qur'an is specifically said to support this claim in 15:28: 'Surely I am going to create a mortal of the essence of black mud fashioned in shape.' The black mud was for Elijah Muhammad the original 'black nation' (Muhammad 1957a, 10). Thus, the creation story in Genesis and its parallels in the Qur'an are not seen as the record of the creation of humankind, but the creation of the white race. Adam represents the white race, the tree of knowledge of good and evil is the creator of the white race (Mr. Yakub), the tree of life is the Nation of Islam (that is, the black Muslim people), and the expulsion from the 'Garden of Eden' is the exile to Europe (Muhammad 1992 [1965], 133).

According to Nation of Islam teaching, the Qur'an also supports this narrative:

The Bible and the Holy Qur-an Sharrieff are full of teachings of this bloody race of devils. They shed the life blood of all life, even their own, and are scientists at deceiving the black people. They deceived the very people of Paradise (Bible, Gen. 2:13). They killed their own brother (Gen. 4:8). The innocent earth's blood (Gen. 4:10) revealed it to its Maker (thy brother's blood cryeth unto me

from the ground). The very earth, the soil of America, soaked with the innocent blood of the so-called Negroes shed by this race of devils, now crieth out to its maker for her burden of carrying the innocent blood of the righteous slain upon her. Let us take a look at the devil's creation from the teaching of the Holy Qur-an. 'And when your Lord said to the angels, I am going to place in the earth one who shall rule, the angels said: "What will Thou place in it such as shall make mischief in it and shed blood, we celebrate Thy praise and extol Thy holiness"['] (Holy Qur-an Sharrieff 2:30). This devil race has and still is doing just that—making mischief and shedding blood of the black nation whom they were grafted from. Your Lord said to the angels, 'Surely I am going to create a mortal of the essence of black mud fashioned in shape' (Holy Qur-an Sharrieff, 15:28). The essence of black mud (the black nation) mentioned is only symbolic, which actually means the sperm of the black nation, and they refused to recognize the black nation as their equal though they were made from and by a black scientist (named Yakub). (Muhammad 1992 [1965], 128)

Several observations can be made from these passages. First, Elijah Muhammad had no difficulty moving between the Bible and the Qur'an—though he hardly did so seamlessly. Second, individual verses are treated as discrete entities with little regard to their original context. Third, the verses are made to fit his narrative. That is to say, the race myth is the framework into which both quranic and biblical verses were placed.

This myth of origins informs the first apocalyptic theme of the Nation of Islam: the radical transformation of the existing world order. One of Fard Muhammad's (and so also Elijah Muhammad's) core teachings was the call to 'Be Yourself!' Since Blacks were innately Muslim, this was in part a 'final call' to Islam. This divine command was also a call to (what would later be called) Black Power. That is, for African Americans to be themselves, they had to undergo a radical economic, political, and sociological self-transformation. Institutions within the Nation of Islam, such as Fruit of Islam and the Muslim Girls Training and General Civilization Class, emphasised morality, discipline, ritualised meetings, and so forth designed to pry African Americans from (white) Christians and their immoral culture. That social separation was also designed to prevent miscegenation, particularly by protecting African American women. Elijah Muhammad also emphasised economic self-sufficiency under the related slogan of 'Do for self!' The Nation of Islam pooled its resources to purchase land for farming, a grocery store, bakery, restaurant, and dry cleaners. The goal was to develop a wholly independent African American economy. But separation from white America went beyond this cultural, social, and economic independence. Physical or geographical separation was required. To that end, the Nation of Islam strongly opposed integration. Even segregation was insufficient—preferable to integration, but far from enough. In fact, Elijah Muhammad demanded that African Americans be given several states with fertile land within the continental United States. These economic, political, and social goals were certainly radical in comparison to other forms of Islam at the time, but in many ways Elijah Muhammad remained quite conservative: economically a capitalist, politically a separatist, and socially patriarchal. Yet, for him, this separation and independence was the only means of securing the survival of African Americans during the apocalyptic destruction of Whites at the end times: the Fall of America.

The Fall of America

The same texts—the Qur'an and the Bible—that record the creation of the white race also <u>prophesy</u> the eschatological events that will bring their evil to a final end. These events are focused on the 'so-called Negroes' in the United States and are among the most frequently and thoroughly discussed by Elijah Muhammad. He devoted many of his regular columns and articles in the Nation of Islam's newspaper, *Muhammad Speaks*, to the subject (many of which were later collected into his book, *The Fall of America*).

Elijah Muhammad saw in the wheel of Ezekiel's vision a reference to the Mother Plane. 'The Mother Plane was made to destroy this world of evil and to show the Wisdom and Mighty Power of the God Who Came to Destroy an old world and set up a new world' (Muhammad 1969b, 20). This Mother Plane, 'a little humanmade planet,' can travel forty miles above the earth's surface, but returns to the earth every six to twelve months for oxygen and hydrogen (Muhammad 1969b, 20–21). According to Elijah Muhammad, the 'devil scientists' were aware of it and unsuccessfully sought to destroy it—a futile effort for it can hide behind stars and make itself invisible. Moreover, 'there are scientists on the Mother Plane who know what you are thinking about before the thought materializes (Holy Quran Ch. 50:16). Therefore, it is impossible to try to attack the Mother Plane. She can attack you, but you cannot attack her' (Muhammad 1969a, 20–21). When it attacks, it will do so with bombs that will fall upon cities only, burrow into the ground for one mile and then explode (Muhammad 1969a, 20–21). These are the same type of bombs, Elijah Muhammad explained, that were once used to create the mountains on earth.

What Elijah Muhammad was considerably less clear or consistent about was when this apocalypse was to occur. In his early writings, the Fall of America should have begun in 1965 or 1966 (Muhammad 1992 [1965], 270). Even in Message to the Blackman in America, published in 1965, he expected the end within twenty-four months (Muhammad 1992 [1965], 297). Elsewhere, he is even more urgent: 'Do not expect ten more years, the fall will be within a few days' (Muhammad 1973, 19). When that date passed, the end was moved to 1970. '[I]t is the end of the time of the white race. This race of people was not created to live on our planet forever; only for six thousand years' (Muhammad 1974a, 60). This dating is a bit confusing, for the prophesied four hundred years of being lost in the wilderness of North America came to an end in 1955 (Muhammad 1992 [1965], 38), since for Elijah Muhammad enslavement of Africans in America began in 1555 (not 1619). Given the early date, the 1955 prophecy may go back to Fard Muhammad himself. Further confusing the account, the end of the six thousand-year rule of Whites was said to have occurred in 1914. The significance of this earlier year is even less clear, but there may be some connection to the Christian restorationist minister C. T. Russell (founder of the Bible Student movement out of which Jehovah's Witnesses later emerged) and his predictions of a 1914 Armageddon or perhaps to the later Jehovah's Witnesses' assertions that 1914 was the beginning of the last days. Elijah Muhammad likely came in contact with the teachings of the leader of the Jehovah Witnesses, Judge Rutherford, through radio broadcasts. According to Essien-Udom, one of the earliest scholars to study the Nation of Islam, 1914 is significant because it was around then that the 'brothers in the East' became aware of the 'lost Nation in the wilderness of North America' (Essien-Udom 1962, 155). Elijah Muhammad was clever enough to explain away the seemingly failed prophecy. The 1914 date, the later date(s) in the 1960s, and yet another date, 1970, were not wrong. Rather, Allah permitted a delay to give African Americans the time they needed to reconvert to Islam (Sahib 1951, 97). There can be no judgment until the 'so-called Negroes hear Islam' (Muhammad 1992 [1965], 18). In his last few years Elijah was more careful not to be definitive. He even wrote of an extension being granted by Allah, depending how the

'righteous' were treated in America. Whenever the end arrives, 'Hell' would then come to an end and the eternal period of 'Heaven' will be ushered in.

Just as the first book of the Christian Bible, Genesis, figured prominently in Elijah Muhammad's account of creation, so its last book, the book of Revelation, was the main source for the <u>prophecies</u> for 'the Judgement,' as he called it. In fact, it was the same Mr. Yakub—the creator of the white race—who is said to have written the book of Revelation. Thus, 6,600 years ago while on the island of Pelan, he foresaw the future of the very people he was 'grafting.' The Qur'an, with its vivid descriptions of the Last Day, also lent itself to Elijah Muhammad's eschatological narrative. His methods were the same as those used for his race myth: the biblical and quranic materials are subservient to his larger narrative, with verses usually treated as discrete entities and cited as appropriate with simple glosses of ambiguous or symbolic terms.

Thus, the devil that Allah will destroy according to Qur'an 7:14 is, of course, the white race; they are also the 'beast' of the book of Revelation and the 'man of sin' in 2 Thessalonians 2:2–9. (Muhammad 1992 [1965], 134, 125–26; 1957b, 18). And the Babylon of the books of Revelation and Jeremiah is America. Elijah Muhammad explained:

The description it [Revelation 18:2] gives is as follows: 'And he (angel) cried might[i]ly with a strong voice (with authority) saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen and is become the habitation of devils (Allah has declared the people to be a race of devils), and the hole of every foul spirit and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.' The description here given to the [sic] Babylon by the Prophets compares with the present history and people of America and their fall. (Muhammad 1992 [1965], 276)

Elijah Muhammad then identified the 'unclean and hateful bird' as the 'low-based, evil-minded' immigrants to America and their uncleanliness as sexual promiscuity and homosexuality (Muhammad 1992 [1965], 276–77). The 'so-called American Negroes' were addressed by the subsequent verse: 'Come out of her that ye be not partakers of her sins and that you receive not of her plagues.' And Qur'an 56:57–59 provides evidence that America's prophesied end was imminent (Muhammad 1992 [1965], 293–95).

Elijah Muhammad also described these end times as a battle between Islam and other religions:

'He is it who sent His Apostle with the guidance and the True religion that he make it overcome the religions, all of them, though the polytheists may be averse.' (The Holy Quran, 61:9) In the above verse Allah (God) in the last days of this present world (of wicked infidels) states that He must destroy false religions with the True Religion Islam. It (Islam) must overcome all other religions. (Muhammad 1957b, 43)

Again, we can see that through paraphrase and gloss Elijah Muhammad made this verse, traditionally thought to be about the Prophet Muhammad's mission to the pagans of the pre-Islamic Arabia, about his own mission. A longer passage illustrates how Elijah Muhammad constructed his prophesies:

The day of decision between the dark races or nations was begun by God Himself in the person of Master Fard Muhammad, to Whom be praised forever, as is prophesied in the Bible: 'Multitudes in the valley of decision, for the day (before or by 1970) of the Lord is near in the valley of decision' (Joel 3:14).

It is clear that the armies of the nations of the earth have geared themselves for a showdown between their forces and Allah and the Nation of Islam. We, the so-called American Negroes, the lost and found members of our Nation, are in this decision. The second and third verses of this same chapter (Chapter 3) read like this: 'I will also gather all nations and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat (Europe and Asia—between black and white) and will plead with them there for my people and my heritage (the lost and found, so-called Negroes), Israel whom they have scattered among the nations and parted my land (between the European white race) and they have casted lots for my people and have given a boy for a harlot and sold a girl for wine that they might drink' (Joel 3:2,3).

America has fulfilled this to the very letter and spirit with her slaves (the so-called Negroes) under the type of Israel. The Egyptians did nothing of the kind to Israel when they were in bondage to them. In fact, and as God has taught me, the Bible is not referring to those people as His People, it is referring to the so-called Negro and his enemy (the white race). The seventh verse also gives us a hint in this way: 'Behold, I will raise them out of the place where you have sold them and will return your recompence [sic] upon your own head' (Joel 3:7). The slave-masters of our fathers must reap what they have sown. Allah calls them to war in the ninth verse of the same chapter. 'Proclaim you among the Gentiles, prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all of the men of war draw near, let them come up' (Joel 3:9). All the mighty men of science and modern warfare have been called in an effort to devise instruments and weapons against God and the armies of heaven. (Muhammad 1992 [1965], 267-68)

Once again, there are several features of note. First, Elijah Muhammad felt no obligation to include any quranic material, though the use of 'day of decision' is quranic language. Second, he inserted comments that identified (what were for him) ambiguous or symbolic words or phrases. Third, the scriptural passages, in this case from the book of Joel but elsewhere almost any passage from the Bible or the Qur'an, were understood through the lens of Elijah Muhammad's racialist narrative of the Fall of America.

The scriptural support for Elijah Muhammad's description of the materiel to be used in this battle, the forces of nature, was drawn primarily from the Bible, such as Ezekiel 14:13, though Qur'an 44:10 was presented to support Allah's promise to use drought. Other references that proved Allah's penchant for the use of natural disasters to punish evildoers, such as the use of water against the people of Noah, fire against Sodom and Gomorrah, and plagues against Pharaoh and his people, could have come from either scripture (Muhammad 1992 [1965], 273, 290–91, and 303).

Given the nature of the coming calamities, physical and geographical separation was the only means to

protect Muslims from this punishment of white America. Initially, he gave their number as 144,000. This number is obviously based on Revelation 14:1, and before his movement grew rapidly, Elijah Muhammad initially believed that only 144,000 Muslims would be saved: the other '16,856,000 would go down with the enemies of Allah (God)' (Muhammad 1956, 2).

After this war and the Fall of America, there would be a time of joy and peace in the presence of Allah. There would be no war, sickness, gambling, cursing, and so forth. Hell—that is, living among Whites—would be at an end. This millenarian peace would not last a mere one thousand years. It was eternal and, though everyone would live much longer, there would be no eternal life. Remaining alive forever is slavery according to Elijah Muhammad. Nor would there be a bodily resurrection of the dead. The resurrection is a psychological, social, economic, and political one. The numerous verses in the Qur'an which speak of physical resurrection were to be interpreted metaphorically. To describe this 'millennium,' he adduced only the invitation of Qur'an 89:27–30: 'O soul that is at rest, return to your Lord, well pleased with Him, well pleasing. So, enter among my servants, and enter into my Paradise' (Muhammad 1992 [1965], 303–5).

Even towards the end of his life, Elijah Muhammad maintained that all Whites are devils, but then in response to a white reporter's question, 'Is there any hope for me?', he replied in a manner atypical of, inconsistent with, and far more generous than his earlier <u>prophecies</u>:

Now, I must tell you the truth. There will be no such thing as elimination of all white people from the earth, at the present time or at the break out of the Holy War. No, because there are some white people today who have faith in Allah and Islam though they are white, and their faith is given credit. They are not born or created Muslims, but they have faith in what the Muslims are and trying to live. It is only through Islam that white people can be saved. But you see there would be a Holy War (they call it a Holy War which means right is against wrong and wrong against right). ("Muhammad Meets the Press!" 1972, 4)

Perhaps the end of the world as we know it might yet be averted.

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