

# Islam in Black America

Identity, Liberation, and Difference  
in African-American Islamic Thought

Edward E. Curtis IV

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To *Walter Ray Elliston*

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Islamic traditions except himself. In a sense, this decision can be viewed as a pragmatic one. Perhaps Muhammad was aware of his own limitations. He had little formal education and his familiarity with Old World Islamic traditions was modest. In fact, he possessed no knowledge of Arabic. If Muhammad had agreed to debate rival Muslims using the terms of Old World Islamic traditions, he would have been entirely outmatched. But by rejecting their challenges and offering his own interpretations of Islam, he effectively ended any possible debate and asserted his own prophetic authority. He embraced a particularistic form of Islam that he could control.

For many of his believers, who felt extremely devoted to Muhammad, this intellectual insularity was not only justified, it was also desirable. After all, many credited the Messenger and his vision with saving their lives—for them, he was their conduit to Islam. It was his Islam of self-reliance, black chosenness, and divine retribution that many saw as their pathway to liberation from oppression, self-hatred, and hopelessness. It was his Islam rather than the Islam of his critics that made their lives new.

But other followers were more independent of Muhammad and questioned his authority on various grounds. For some of them, like Malcolm X, Muhammad's thought became the particularistic springboard for other visions of Islam that embraced universalism in equally absolutist ways. In fact, one of the ironies of movement history was that in trying to defend his teacher, Malcolm confronted Muhammad's critics on their own terms—that is, by trying to use Old World Islamic traditions to justify Muhammad's beliefs. In so doing, however, he came to care far more about Muslims outside of the movement and about the traditions of Old World Islam. This seminal intellectual moment in the history of African-American Islamic thought had vital, if unforeseen consequences, as the next chapter shows.

## Chapter 5

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### Islamic Universalism, Black Particularism, and the Dual Identity of Malcolm X (1925–1965)

#### INTRODUCTION

This chapter argues that at the end of his life, Malcolm X faced what he called a “double burden”—namely, to be true to his universalistic interpretation of Islam while also promoting the particularistic goals of pan-Africanism. Unlike Blyden, Drew Ali, or Muhammad, Malcolm came to define Islam in strictly universalistic ways. Accepting the “Islam” of his Arab Muslim sponsors, he never questioned whether Islam might be a vehicle for black nationalism, messianism, or any other form of particularism. For Malcolm, as I show below, Islam was no more relevant to “black” people than it was to “white” people; it was a “human” tradition that applied equally to all human beings. At the same time, however, Malcolm did not look to this universalistic Islam as any sort of strategy in his fight for black liberation; instead, he espoused a pan-African struggle led exclusively by and for blacks. Moreover, like Blyden, Drew Ali, and Muhammad, he believed in an essentialist black identity, characterized by shared biological and intellectual traits, that linked together all persons of African descent into a common community.

Because Malcolm viewed his own black identity as different from and nearly antithetical to his Muslim identity, his thought exhibited a form of what W. E. B. DuBois famously called “double consciousness.” In fact, Malcolm's simultaneous commitments to identities that he viewed as contradictory shaped much of his thought, including his discussion of “religion” and “politics.” On the one hand, he championed a particularistic black politics

that sought to bring blacks together based on their common cultural and biological traits. On the other, he believed in an Islam that, by definition, could have nothing to do with particularistic movements or struggles. Consequently, he said, he must keep his religion and politics separate. The result of his doubleness was that his Islam, which had been a powerful force in his life, could have nothing to do with his struggle for black freedom, which had been an equally, if not more significant force in his life.

In order to understand how Malcolm developed his self-confessed dual identity, this chapter begins with a brief biographical sketch of Malcolm's life before 1960. I then focus on the intellectual issues surrounding Malcolm's separation from Elijah Muhammad and demonstrate how Malcolm's interaction with and eventual sponsorship by Muslim missionaries during the early 1960s led him to embrace a universalistic definition of the "true" Islam. In the next section, I explore Malcolm's embrace of pan-Africanism as an approach to the struggle for black freedom and show how this commitment led him to distinguish between his "religion" and his "politics." I conclude with a discussion of how, until his brutal assassination, Malcolm committed himself to starkly dichotomous views of Islamic universalism and black particularism.

### MALCOLM X BEFORE 1960

Of all the figures examined in this study, no one has been a more important symbol in American and Afro-American popular culture than Malcolm X. Malcolm's mythological place in black culture emerged soon after his death, brought about in part by the release of the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*. This work quickly became a bestseller and since then a classic of American literature. In addition, figures in the black power struggle of the second half of the 1960s appropriated Malcolm as an icon of black liberation, making him even more significant in death than he was in life. In the 1990s, Spike Lee's biographical movie, based largely on the *Autobiography*, both renewed and reflected popular fascination with the famous hustler turned Muslim. Also during the past decade, authors like James Cone have seized Malcolm as a didactic contrast to Martin Luther King, Jr., and his advocacy of nonviolence.<sup>1</sup>

Partly because of his symbolic and mythological significance, Malcolm has received an enormous amount of scholarly attention in the American academy. In addition to the vast number of articles about Malcolm, a number of full-length treatments have been devoted to his life

and its historical meaning. Peter Goldman's biography, for example, stands as a useful introduction to Malcolm. The extensive and controversial biographies of Eugene Wolfenstein and Bruce Perry employ psychohistory to illuminate nearly every event in his life. Both Robin Kelley and Clayborne Carson, on the other hand, have examined Malcolm in the context of the social and cultural history of both World War II and the postwar period. Finally, paying more attention to Malcolm's life of faith than any previous author, Louis DeCaro's biography speaks to Malcolm's double conversion, first to Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam, then to Sunni Islam.<sup>2</sup> Because Malcolm's biographical data has been extensively studied by these authors, I begin with only a brief summary of his life before the 1960s, after which I develop my own argument about the importance of his dual identity during his final years.

According to Malcolm's autobiography, he was born into an activist family. His mother, Louise, was a Caribbean émigré from Grenada and, like her husband, a committed Garveyite. While Malcolm's father, Earl, organized UNIA activities in Omaha, Louise contributed material to the *Negro World*, the UNIA's official periodical. By the late 1920s, the Littles had moved to East Lansing, Michigan. In 1931 Earl was tragically run over by a streetcar and died; later Malcolm said that, according to rumors he had heard, the accident was intentional. In 1939, broken by the Great Depression, his mother Louise was no longer able to care for her children and was declared legally insane. Malcolm spent the next few years in various foster homes, eventually moving to the East Coast.<sup>3</sup>

At various times from 1940 to 1944, Malcolm lived both in Boston and New York. In those cities, he joined the ranks of a wartime black youth culture that donned the zoot suit, did the lindy hop, and listened to bebop. Many of these young men avoided work, slept around, dodged the draft, and often embraced hustling, the numbers rackets, and drugs. According to Robin Kelley, their modes of dress, speech, and behavior, if criminal, were also subtle forms of resistance against middle-class norms, especially those of middle-class blacks. For Malcolm, however, this alternate world of cultural resistance came to an end in 1946, when he was indicted for larceny, firearm violations, and breaking and entering. In March, after being convicted, he entered a Massachusetts state prison. It was during this incarceration that Malcolm's first conversion took place. While he was in Concord Reformatory in 1947, Philbert and Reginald Little, two of Malcolm's siblings, encouraged their brother to learn about the teachings of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. Malcolm's conversion, dramatically portrayed as both sudden and blinding in Spike Lee's film,

actually occurred over a period of months as Malcolm became more familiar with the Nation's teachings.<sup>4</sup>

After Malcolm was paroled in 1952, he quickly rose to prominence within the Nation. The next year, Elijah Muhammad appointed him assistant minister at the Detroit temple. For the following three years, Malcolm led the temples in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. Employing revival-type meetings and other sophisticated evangelistic techniques to attract young African Americans to the NOI, he quickly became the movement's most able and well-known evangelist. In 1957, he also gained the attention of black New Yorkers and New York City authorities, when he successfully demanded that a fellow Muslim receive medical attention after a beating by some police officers in Harlem's twenty-eighth precinct. Then during 1959, Malcolm garnered national attention when Mike Wallace's *The Hate that Hate Produced* aired on WTNA-TV. Afterwards, Malcolm regularly appeared on a number of television and radio programs, often debating the merits of separatism with advocates of integration. During this period, according to his autobiography, Malcolm was a loyal servant of Elijah Muhammad, never questioning the leader's approach to civil rights or matters of belief. Only after Malcolm's suspension from the Nation, the *Autobiography* indicated, did Malcolm truly question the leader's approach to these issues. The *Autobiography* also characterized Malcolm's attraction to Sunni Islam and his activist politics as phenomena that occurred after the break with Elijah Muhammad. While Malcolm himself may have genuinely felt this way about his activities during the last year of his life, quite a different pattern emerges from the available sources. In fact, it is quite clear that Malcolm had begun to have his doubts about the Messenger by the late 1950s, as the following section argues.<sup>5</sup>

### MALCOLM'S SECOND CONVERSION AND THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF MUSLIM MISSIONARIES

By 1959, as seen in chapter 4, several mainstream Islamic groups launched attacks on the legitimacy of Elijah Muhammad and the NOI. As national spokesman for Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm defended the Messenger and his teachings. Unlike his mentor, however, he tried to shield the NOI from criticism by appropriating elements of Islamic discourse, especially passages from the Qur'an, to legitimate Muhammad's beliefs. In a letter dated November 24, 1962, for example, Malcolm wrote to the New York *Amsterdam News* to protest one Afghani Muslim's critique of the NOI.

He cited Qur'an 20:102 as proof for the Islamic legitimacy of Muhammad's view that all white people were blue-eyed devils destined to face divine retribution at the end time. "The day when the trumpet is blown," Malcolm quoted the verse, "and we shall gather the guilty, blue-eyed, on that day." In a 1963 edition of the *New York Times Magazine*, however, Robert Payne argued that Malcolm's use of the text was faulty and that "all sinners, not only blue-eyed ones, are implicated in the judgement." Indeed, though Malcolm's translation of the verse was perfectly legitimate, he seemingly had no idea how the "guilty, blue-eyed" persons mentioned in the text had been traditionally defined in *tafsir*, or classical Qur'anic commentary. The "blue-eyed," or *zurqa*, according to some commentators, can refer to the image of blue- or blind-eyed persons with black faces—a definition that, if he had known about it, might have made Malcolm think twice before using this verse in support of an antiwhite theology. Moreover, the "guilty," according to some *tafsir*, can refer to criminals, polytheists, sinners, or disbelievers in the oneness of God—another fact of which Malcolm seemed to have been unaware. The important point is that, despite Malcolm's intentions, he simply lacked the intellectual resources to make a forceful defense of Muhammad using the terms of Old World Islamic traditions.<sup>6</sup>

Malcolm also criticized Muhammad's naysayers as whites or "Uncle Tom" Muslims who had done nothing to advance the interests of blacks. They failed to recognize, as Malcolm said in a March 24, 1961 speech at the Harvard Law School, that Elijah Muhammad had a "new dispensation." Comparing the NOI leader to Moses and Jesus, Malcolm argued that Muhammad had been "raised up among his enslaved people at a time when God was planning to restore them to a land of their own where they could give birth to a new civilization." Those whites who criticized the legitimacy of this man, he said, were simply trying to "separate us from the Muslim world." As for immigrant critics of Muhammad, they had not been successful "in converting one thousand Americans to Islam." Elijah Muhammad, on the other hand, "has hundreds of thousands of his fellow ex-slaves turning eastward toward Mecca five times daily giving praises to the great God Allah." Of course, this claim was an exaggeration, if not an outright falsehood. As observed in the previous chapter, very few members actually practiced the Islamic *salat*, despite the fact that Muhammad had encouraged them to do so in his prayer manual.<sup>7</sup>

But in another sense, the fact that Malcolm now cited the daily practice of prayer, one of the five pillars of Islam, as proof of the movement's legitimacy, showed just how much mainstream criticisms of the



movement were beginning to affect him. Particularly disturbing to Malcolm were the Muslim students who often confronted him about the differences between the "true" Islam and the NOI. Concerned that NOI theology might be mistaken for their own beliefs about Islam, these students often accosted Malcolm on the streets of New York and along the college lecture circuit. In 1962, one immigrant Muslim student at Dartmouth, Ahmed Osman, traveled to NOI Mosque No. 7 to question Malcolm about Islam. After grilling Malcolm in the question and answer section of his talk, Osman came away "unsatisfied." Malcolm himself seemed affected by the encounter, for when Osman began to send Malcolm literature from the Islamic Centre in Geneva, Switzerland, he read it and asked for more. In another incident, Arab students from UCLA surrounded Malcolm after a March 1963 appearance on the *Ben Hunter Show* in Los Angeles. After hearing the students argue that his belief in white devils was un-Islamic, Malcolm became quite disturbed, according to journalist Louis Lomax, who was accompanying Malcolm at the time.<sup>8</sup>

While Malcolm continued to defend Elijah Muhammad and his Islamic dispensationalism throughout 1963, it is clear that by this time his separation from his spiritual father had already begun. During a March 3 appearance on the Chicago television show, *At Random*, Malcolm redefined "white devils" to mean any human being who "intentionally or consciously carries into practice the attributes or characteristics of the devil." While this was not yet a full denial of the belief that whites were by their very nature evil, such a statement came a few months later when Malcolm spoke on the Washington, D.C., radio program, *Focus*, aired over WUST on May 12. "When you are a Muslim," Malcolm said, "you don't look at the color of a man's skin . . . you look at the man and judge him according to his conscious behavior." This was the practice of Muslims in the Islamic lands, he argued, and it should also be the practice of black Muslims in the United States. "[M]any people in this country think we are against the white man because he is white . . . [but] we are against the white man because of what he has done to the black man."<sup>9</sup>

Though Malcolm remained the loyal national spokesman of Elijah Muhammad throughout 1963, he was also questioning the morality of his leader. The previous year, Malcolm had visited three of Muhammad's secretaries, all of whom had given birth to the Messenger's illegitimate children. In April, he apparently confronted the Messenger about these relationships at Muhammad's house in Phoenix. Furthermore, Malcolm was clearly becoming frustrated by Muhammad's prohibition against any political activities. While Malcolm both dutifully publicized and obeyed

Muhammad's directive that no member of the NOI support or participate in the March on Washington that year, Malcolm appeared at the march as a "critical observer." Notwithstanding his comments about the march as a "farce" on Washington, Malcolm seemed to be unable to resist the chance to be at this important event.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, on December 1, Malcolm officially rebelled by disobeying Elijah Muhammad's directive that no Muslim minister comment on the assassination of President Kennedy. On December 4, Muhammad suspended Malcolm from his duties as national spokesman and demanded his silence. Malcolm initially expressed acquiescence toward the order, but statements made previously that year showed that part of Malcolm had already accepted the necessity of a separation from Muhammad long before this time. On March 8, 1964, Malcolm announced that he was leaving the movement for good. Four days later, he outlined his intentions for the future at the Park Sheraton in New York. In his statement, Malcolm announced that he would embrace cooperation with other black leaders interested in pursuing an activist strategy toward black liberation. "We must control the politics and the politicians of our community," he argued. At the same time, Malcolm unveiled his plans to create the Muslim Mosque, Inc. "I am and always will be a Muslim," he said. "I am going to organize and head a new mosque in New York City." While Malcolm embraced black nationalism as his political ideology, he upheld Islam as "the spiritual force necessary to rid our people of the vices that destroy the moral fiber of our community." Speaking at Harvard College ten days later on March 18, 1964, Malcolm explicated his new position a bit further, stating that "we believe that the religion of Islam combined with Black Nationalism is all that is needed to solve the problem" of the black community. Here Malcolm defined black nationalism as a comprehensive approach to social life that included economic self-determination, moral renewal, racial pride, and political involvement—a platform that sounded very much like the program of Marcus Garvey.<sup>11</sup>

In the meantime, however, Malcolm was also exploring Sunni Islam and beginning to make more intimate contact with immigrant Muslims. In particular, Malcolm turned to Dr. Mahmoud Youssef Shawarbi, a University of Cairo professor in the United States on a Fulbright grant to teach at Fordham University. Malcolm knew of Shawarbi through the numerous immigrant and foreign Muslims, especially Muslim students, who had accosted him during his various lectures and appearances before the media. "Those orthodox Muslims whom I had met, one after another, had urged me to meet and talk with a Dr. Mahmoud Youssef Shawarbi,"

he said in his *Autobiography*. Shawarbi encouraged Malcolm to make the *hajj*, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, and instructed him in the fundamental elements of Sunni Islam.<sup>12</sup>

Most scholars present the relationship between Shawarbi and Malcolm as a product of Malcolm's reaching out toward Sunni Islam. While this was certainly the case, it was not a one-way relationship. In fact, Malcolm converted to Sunni Islam at arguably the most important moment in the history of Muslim missionary activity, or *da'wa*, in North America. In the first half of the twentieth century, most Muslims focused on *da'wa* as an activity to be conducted among other Muslims. Groups like the Muslim Brothers in Egypt and the Society of the Call and Guidance in South Asia aspired mostly to change Islamic practices within *dar al-islam*, or Islamdom. Only the Ahmadiya movement committed serious resources to spreading Islam among all non-Muslims and North Americans, especially. After World War II, however, *da'wa* became entangled in world politics as the former European protectorates emerged into Arab nation-states. On one level, *da'wa* was emphasized as a part of these new states' foreign policy in the West. By sponsoring Muslim missionaries in non-Muslim states, they hoped to spread their influence abroad and soften derogatory images of Islam.<sup>13</sup>

In a more direct way, however, *da'wa* was one of the secondary fronts of what Malcolm Kerr called the "Arab Cold War," especially the conflict between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Egypt. These two states were locked in ideological and military struggles from 1958 through the 1960s. The ideological battle began shortly after Egyptian President Gamal Abd al-Nassir successfully entered into a political union with Syria in the winter of 1958. The United Arab Republic (UAR), as the two states became known, signaled the growth of both revolutionary socialism and pan-Arabism, the movement to unite all Arab peoples into one political entity. A few months later, when revolution overturned the Iraqi monarchy and an uprising occurred against President Sham'un in Lebanon, monarchs throughout the Middle East feared that Nassirism might actually succeed. But, due to the failure of the UAR and the constantly shifting alliances that characterized Middle Eastern politics, their fears were never realized. The idea of Arab unity remained only a symbol—albeit one of paramount importance—in Arab political culture during the following decade. As such, aspiring revolutionaries aligned with Nassir might always use it to upset the neocolonialist status quo. But while this ideological struggle provided the general context of tensions between Egypt and Saudi Arabia, the two states also engaged in an actual military conflict through their involvement in the Yemeni revolution of 1962. Here, too, monarchical

forces faced the challenge of a socialist revolution that Nassir supported by sending thousands of Egyptian troops.<sup>14</sup>

This conflict most certainly influenced the missionary efforts sponsored by Saudi Arabia, which established a new university in Medina committed to the training of Muslim missionaries in 1961. The following year, as tension over Yemen escalated, the government supported the founding of the Muslim World League, whose statement of purpose included a commitment to *da'wa*. An impressive array of Muslim personages attended the organization's inaugural meeting, including the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Said Ramadan of Egypt, Allal al-Fasi of Morocco, and Mawlana Maududi of Pakistan. Not surprisingly, the conference was strongly anti-Nassirist, promoting a vision of pan-Islam that hoped to counter the powerful Arab populist. Ramadan, like many other Arab missionaries, was a member of the Muslim Brothers, a politically minded religious group that had been forcefully repressed by Nassir.<sup>15</sup>

A politicization of Islam also occurred among Muslim students in the West. These were the same Muslims who continually hounded Malcolm as he traveled the campus lecture circuit. In 1963, several students from a variety of countries gathered at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana to establish the Muslim Students Association (MSA). Among the founding members were three Muslim Brothers from Egypt. Using their positions on college campuses, these activists helped to make the MSA one of the most successful immigrant-led organizations in the propagation of Islam throughout North America.<sup>16</sup>

By seeking the guidance of Mahmoud Youssef Shawarbi, another Egyptian reportedly disliked by the Nassir regime, Malcolm unknowingly thrust himself into the center of this new Saudi-financed missionary activity. After training Malcolm in the rudiments of Sunni Islamic thought and practice, Shawarbi gave Malcolm a letter of recommendation, a copy of *The Eternal Message of Muhammad* by the renowned pan-Islamicist Abd al-Rahman Azzam, and the phone number of Azzam's son, who happened to be married to the daughter of Saudi Prince Faysal. The elder Azzam was one of pan-Islam's most important figures. A father of Arab nationalism and a distinguished Egyptian diplomat, Azzam was a chief architect of the Arab League and served as its first secretary general from 1945 to 1952. But like so many others, he lost favor after Nassir came to power, finding refuge in Saudi Arabia, where he became a leading pan-Islamic polemicist and author.<sup>17</sup>

His *Eternal Message of Muhammad*, still available in a 1993 edition, was a primary example of a popular modern Islamic polemic that both defended Islam against Western critics and advocated a vision of the ideal



Islamic nation-state. Islam, Azzam said, was a "faith, a law, a way of life, a 'nation,' and 'state.'" Contrary to Western assumptions, Azzam implied, Islam was a highly modern religious tradition that promoted tolerance, removed superstition, and encouraged mercy, charity, industriousness, fairness, and brotherhood in the hearts and minds of its adherents. Islam, according to Azzam, also required that all political leaders enjoy the consent of their fellow citizens. Islam, he implied, intrinsically possessed many elements of Western liberalism, but incorporated them into a theocratic form of governance. The West, he argued, based its social life on materialism, which produced modern colonialism and class struggle; as a theocratic system, Islam eliminated such problems.<sup>18</sup>

Whether or not Malcolm ever read this book is unclear. But Malcolm did come under the influence of Azzam himself during the pilgrimage. On April 13, 1964, Malcolm departed JFK International Airport with a one-way plane ticket to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. When Malcolm arrived on the Arabian peninsula, Saudi authorities detained him for special interrogation. After fretting for some time, Malcolm thought to telephone Azzam's son, Dr. Omar Azzam. Upon hearing word of Malcolm's difficulties, the Azzams immediately interceded with the proper authorities. They vouched for Malcolm when he faced an examination by the hajj court, the legal entity that decides whether one is a legitimate Muslim able to participate in the pilgrimage. In fact, Prince Faysal himself probably communicated with the court on Malcolm's behalf. In addition, the elder Azzam insisted that Malcolm stay in his suite at the Jeddah Palace Hotel. Later, the Saudi government officially extended its welcome when the Deputy Chief of Protocol, Muhammad Abdul Azziz Maged, gave Malcolm a special car in which to travel during his time in the kingdom.<sup>19</sup>

The Azzams, Malcolm claimed in the *Autobiography*, had nothing to gain by their hospitality. This was surprising, Malcolm said, since he had never known such light-complexioned people to be so generous to a black man without expectation of advantage or favor. According to Malcolm, this act led him to "reappraise the 'white man.'" It was the first moment, he said, in which "I first began to perceive that 'white man,' as commonly used, means complexion only secondarily; primarily, it described attitudes and actions." Though Malcolm had expressed such sentiments in 1963, well before he separated from the Nation of Islam or traveled to the Middle East, the *Autobiography* did not include such information. Instead, it depicted the pilgrimage as a truly watershed moment in Malcolm's spiritual life. Malcolm also desired his trip to be viewed as such. In a letter from Mecca that Malcolm sent to both friends and the press, he said

that the hajj represented the first occasion in his life during which he had experienced real brotherhood between peoples of all races. The pilgrims, Malcolm said, "were of all colors. . . . But we were all participating in the same ritual, displaying a spirit of unity and brotherhood that my experiences in America had led me to believe never could exist between the white and the non-white." Islam, he said, had seemingly removed racism from the white mind. All of America, he concluded, needed to believe in the oneness of God if this kind of unity was to be realized across the Atlantic. For the first and perhaps last time, Malcolm imagined that Islam might have the power to change people's attitudes towards race.<sup>20</sup>

This is exactly what his Saudi hosts hoped to hear. According to Malcolm, the elder Azzam had expressed such sentiments during dinner with Malcolm before he left Jeddah for Mecca. During that occasion, Azzam argued that Islam was a tradition free of racial prejudice from its very beginning. He illustrated the point by claiming that the Prophet Muhammad himself was a man of both black and white ancestries. He also confronted the charge by Western critics that racism was as difficult a problem in Islam as it was in the West by blaming Western influence. "[T]he problems of color which exist in the Muslim world," Azzam said, "exist only where, and to the extent that, that area of the Muslim world has been influenced by the West." Racism is foreign to the very nature of Islam, Azzam indicated, and has only been practiced where Muslims have acted in an un-Islamic fashion—that is, like Westerners. Even Prince Faysal joined in the effort to help Malcolm understand the "true" meaning of Islam. After Malcolm completed the pilgrimage, Prince Faysal invited him for an audience at which, once again, Malcolm was assured that his special treatment was offered freely, without any expectation of a quid pro quo. Of course, the Prince then proceeded to quiz Malcolm about the Nation of Islam, carefully suggesting that if what he had read in Egyptian papers were true, they did not practice the "true" Islam. Further, the prince reminded Malcolm that due to the abundance of English literature on Islam "there was no excuse for ignorance, and no reason for sincere people to allow themselves to be misled." Prince Faysal, in other words, wanted to make sure that the message of his hospitality was clear: now that Malcolm had experienced the "real" Islam, the royal implied, he should be able to represent it properly in the United States.<sup>21</sup>

Malcolm seemed to accept his Saudi hosts as sincere. If calculated, the interest shown in Malcolm by those connected to Saudi interests, like Azzam, was by no means nefarious. While Azzam and the Saudi authorities hoped to gain an ally in the United States, they were also assisting

Malcolm to achieve legitimacy and acceptance as a Sunni Muslim and an international black leader. The problem for Malcolm was that even in the mystical Holy Land, he could not ignore the power of race as a sociological reality. Observing the masses of pilgrims at Mecca, Malcolm concluded in a letter sent back to his followers in the United States that "there was a color pattern in the huge crowds [of pilgrims] . . . where true brotherhood existed among all colors, where no one felt segregated, where there was no 'superiority' complex, no 'inferiority complex'—then voluntarily, naturally, people of the same kind felt drawn together by that which they had in common." No matter how strong the universalistic impulses of Islam might shape its adherents, he implied, some natural impulse still led humans to seek out their own color group. Moreover, in this same letter Malcolm also wrote that he had continued to publicize the "evils and the indignities that are suffered by the black man in America." He had even done so while on Arafat, which for many is the climax of the hajj.<sup>22</sup>

While the hajj had been a personally meaningful event in Malcolm's life, it led him neither to question his essentialist views of race nor to develop a strategy for black liberation based on a universalistic interpretation of Islam. Islam, he concluded, may have the power to make all humans feel equal to one another, but it did not lessen their desire to divide themselves into separate groups based on color. He also mentioned that Islam seemingly removed racism from the white mind and publicized the fight for black liberation among his fellow pilgrims. But he did not reflect upon a politics that might utilize Islamic universalism nor did he articulate any specifically pan-Islamic strategy for black liberation. In fact, after Malcolm left the sanctuary of the pilgrimage in April 1964, any liberating potential of Islam for race relations in the United States seemed more distant in his mind as he came to reflect more deeply on pan-Africanism during his tour of the newly emerging African states.

#### PAN-AFRICANISM, MALCOLM'S PIVOTAL AFRICAN TOUR, AND BLACK LIBERATION STRATEGY

In 1945, George Padmore helped to launch postwar pan-Africanism by organizing an important conference in Manchester, England. Largely controlled by delegates from British colonies, this conference differed from past pan-African gatherings as indigenous Africans upstaged African-American and West Indian representatives, including W. E. B. DuBois, one of the fathers of the movement. During the 1950s, the intellectual

center of pan-Africanism moved from London to Africa itself as the former colonies emerged as new nation-states. The Egyptian revolution of 1952, the Algerian struggle for independence, the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung, and the establishment of Guinea as an independent state in 1958 all contributed to this phenomenon. Above all, however, the career of Kwame Nkrumah propelled the new energy behind pan-Africanism. Elected as Prime Minister of the Gold Coast in 1951, Nkrumah quickly became an international figure, appearing in front of adoring crowds throughout the world, including one in Harlem in 1956. In 1957, Nkrumah became even more important to the history of pan-Africanism after he led his country's transition from the Gold Coast to the independent state of Ghana. Nkrumah appointed George Padmore chief of the Bureau of African Affairs, the umbrella under which Padmore organized a 1958 conference of the independent African states, including Ethiopia, Liberia, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, and Ghana. At the end of the same year, Padmore inspired the first All-African Peoples' Conference to which representatives from every African state and colony were invited. In 1963, the Organization for African Unity succeeded the Conference as the major transnational body of African states. Postwar pan-Africanism thus developed in the shadow of decolonization. As such, the one common characteristic that it shared was a "common rejection of white predominance and colonialism." But many of its West African proponents, in particular, also interpreted the movement as a call for racial solidarity and cultural unity. It was this brand of pan-Africanism that Malcolm discovered during his visit to Ghana following the pilgrimage.<sup>23</sup>

After spending more than two weeks in Saudi Arabia, Malcolm departed for Beirut on April 30, 1964. From Beirut, where he delivered a talk on the failures of the civil rights movement, Malcolm traveled to Lagos, Nigeria (via Cairo and Alexandria). There he underwent what might be fruitfully seen as yet a third conversion. On May 8, Malcolm addressed a group of Ibadan University students, first at Trenchard Hall, then at the Student Union. At the second talk, students gave Malcolm a new name, "Omowale," meaning "the son who has come home." According to Malcolm, he responded enthusiastically, telling them that he had never "received a more treasured honor." In fact, Malcolm consistently used words like "thrilling" and "speechless" to narrate his trip in West Africa.<sup>24</sup>

Writing from Lagos on May 10, Malcolm began to promote pan-Africanism as his preferred strategy for black liberation. But he did not abandon his role as African-American Muslim spokesperson, either. While he still expressed the "hope that my Hajj to the Holy City . . . will

establish the religious affiliation of the Muslim Mosque, Inc., with the 750 million Muslims of the world once and for all," he also asserted that the black struggle had an importance that went beyond concerns of confessional affiliation. In fact, he argued that Muslims should concern themselves with oppression against blacks because it was a violation of the "human rights" of persons of African descent. "The Koran," Malcolm wrote, "compels the Muslim world to take a stand on the side of those whose human rights are being violated, no matter what the religious persuasion of the victims is." In this passage, he again indicated that he conceived of Islam as an essentially universalistic tradition that required concern for humans as humans. In effect, he said, Muslims should not support pan-Africanism because they are pro-black or pro-Muslim; they should support pan-Africanism because they are pro-human.<sup>25</sup>

Still, Malcolm was beginning to think that his main mission in life should be to develop support for pan-Africanism. In fact, his trip to Ghana only cemented this commitment further. On May 10, the same day that he dated his letter, Malcolm flew to Accra, Ghana, where he became an official guest of state. The newspaper compared his arrival to that of W. E. B. DuBois, the American expatriate whom Nkrumah had treated as black royalty. Malcolm met with Ghanaian officials, addressed the parliament, and was honored at both a state dinner and by the Algerian and Chinese ambassadors. "I can only wish," he wrote, "that every American black man could have shared my ears, my eyes, and my emotions throughout the round of engagements which had been made for me." By the end of the trip, Malcolm uncharacteristically proclaimed that "I no longer had any words." In Malcolm's meeting with President Nkrumah on May 15, both agreed, according to Malcolm, that "Pan-Africanism was the key . . . to the problems of those of African heritage." In a letter penned four days earlier from Accra, Malcolm made his advocacy of pan-Africanism even more explicit, comparing the black unity to that of worldwide Jewry. "Just as the American Jew is in harmony (politically, economically, and culturally) with world Jewry," Malcolm wrote, "it is time for all African-Americans to become an integral part of the world's Pan-Africanists." Blacks need not physically immigrate to Africa, he said, as much as "we must 'return' to Africa philosophically and culturally and develop a working unity in the framework of Pan-Africanism."<sup>26</sup>

But Malcolm was concerned that his views would spark criticism among his Muslim benefactors, who might assume that he had reverted to his old racist beliefs or that he had no intention of spreading the universalistic message that they attempted to convey to him. In his *Autobiography*, he assured them that "my reacting as I did presented no conflict with

the convictions of brotherhood which I had gained in the Holy Land." At the same time, Malcolm maintained that a pan-African political agenda was the most realistic strategy for awakening the revolutionary consciousness of black America. Mass conversion to Islam, he seemed to say, was simply an impractical solution to the race problem. This was because of Christianity's strong hold on the soul of black America. "America's Negroes," he said, "are too indelibly soaked in Christianity's double standard of oppression" for Islam to have an adequate impact on them. What he meant by this was a bit opaque. Did he believe that something other than "religion" was needed to awaken black America? Or did he mean that one could never expect enough black Americans to convert to Islam to make a real difference? In this passage, at least, no clear answer emerged.<sup>27</sup>

Malcolm soon became a leading voice for pan-Africanism, filling a gap in the ideological spectrum that had existed throughout the previous decade, when no major group emerged in black America to trumpet the values of Nkrumah's and Padmore's pan-Africanism. After visiting Senegal, Morocco, and Algeria, Malcolm returned from this pivotal trip to New York on May 21, 1964. Back in the United States, he also celebrated his new status as a bona fide Sunni Muslim leader. Moreover, Malcolm stepped up his criticism of Elijah Muhammad, making it seem as if he were now ready to challenge the authority of his former mentor. Malcolm's rhetorical jousting, however, was a dangerous game. After Malcolm let it be known on June 8 that as many as six women were involved in the Messenger's sex scandal, he began to receive death threats. While Malcolm managed to announce the formation of an Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU) on June 28, 1964, problems with the NOI only escalated. Malcolm took others' advice to disappear again and left New York for Cairo on July 6, 1964. On this trip to the Middle East and Africa, Malcolm attempted to juggle his commitment to pan-Africanism as a liberation strategy with his newfound identity as a Sunni Muslim missionary. It became clear, however, that Malcolm would not relinquish the fight for pan-African liberation, no matter what his Arab hosts said.<sup>28</sup>

#### THE BIFURCATION OF POLITICS AND RELIGION: PAN-AFRICANISM VS. ISLAM

On July 17, 1964, Malcolm attended the African Summit Conference in Cairo as a representative of the OAAU. Practically every African head of state was present at the meeting, which was the second such gathering sponsored by the Organization of African Unity. President Nassir's



welcoming address, a kind of retrospective of the past year, lauded the passage of the 1964 civil rights bill in the United States. Others at the conference also gave the impression that they had better let American blacks take care of their own problems. Malcolm sought to challenge both of these positions. As an official observer at the conference, Malcolm submitted an eight-page memorandum that tried to convince African leaders that "our problem is your problem." America, Malcolm said, was good at "trickery" when it came to civil rights, but the United States was actually "the century's leading neo-colonialist power." Further, Malcolm asked African support for measures to guarantee the human rights of Afro-Americans by bringing the problem before the United Nations. In closing, Malcolm beseeched the conferees not to replace European colonialism with American dollarism.<sup>29</sup>

Malcolm suspected, however, that his Muslim hosts and pro-Saudi allies would once again take him only for a black nationalist. In a speech on July 27 before Cairo's Shubaan al-Muslimeen, a youth organization much like the YMCA, Malcolm reassured his audience that his fight for black liberation did not contradict his desire to be a good Muslim. "[M]y fight is two-fold, my burden is double, my responsibilities multiple . . . material as well as spiritual, political as well as religious, racial as well as non-racial," he declared. "I will never hesitate to let the entire world know the hell my people suffer from America's deceit and her hypocrisy, as well as her oppression." Throughout the summer, Malcolm continued to press his case in Egypt, speaking in Alexandria on August 4 and attending a second African Summit Conference on August 21. It was during this second tour that the Egyptian-sponsored Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (SCIA) granted Malcolm twenty scholarships for study at the University of al-Azhar, arguably the most prestigious Islamic university in the world.<sup>30</sup>

While Malcolm was clearly adopting pan-Africanism as the animating force behind his politics, he did not relinquish his own personal interest in Islam either. In September 1964, Malcolm left for another pilgrimage to Mecca. During this *umra*, or lesser pilgrimage, Malcolm underwent training as an evangelist by the World Muslim League. Shaykh Muhammad Sarur al-Sabban, secretary general of the organization and a descendant of black slaves, oversaw his training. The University of Medina, like the SCIA, granted Malcolm several scholarships for study there. According to Richard W. Murphy, then second secretary at the American embassy in Jeddah, Malcolm granted an interview to a Jeddah newspaper, *al-Bilad*, in which he "took pains . . . to deprecate his reputation as a political activist and dwelt mainly on his interest in bringing sounder appreciation of Islam

to American Negroes." It is difficult to tell whether Malcolm was simply telling his Saudi hosts what they wanted to hear or whether the account of the Saudi newspaper on which Murphy based his memorandum distorted Malcolm's words. Perhaps this is what he actually believed at the time. Whichever interpretation is correct, however, Malcolm clearly relished another opportunity to focus on his "personal spiritual development . . . far away from politics."<sup>31</sup>

In October and November, however, it was back to politics. Throughout these two months, Malcolm met with eleven African heads of state and other VIPs, including Kenyan President Jomo Kenyatta and Ugandan Milton Obote. Concerned that factionalism might tear Africa apart, Malcolm returned to New York on November 24, 1964, with a renewed determination to fight for the ideals of pan-African unity. From this point until his death in February, Malcolm's speeches became harshly critical not only of United States policy towards American blacks, but towards African blacks, as well. Malcolm focused, in particular, on United States support for Moise Tshombe's junta in the Congo. In late 1960, CIA Director Allen Dulles spearheaded the effort to depose Patrice Lumumba, the leader of the movement that had helped to win Congolese independence from Belgium. In his place, the United States supported Moise Tshombe, whose forces murdered Lumumba in January 1961. From November 1964 until February 1965, Malcolm cited the Congolese intervention as one of the worst forms of United States deceit and wondered aloud whether he should recruit a force of black American freedom fighters to tip the balance in favor of the anti-Tshombe forces.<sup>32</sup>

In describing other reasons for his support of a pan-African struggle, Malcolm also reaffirmed his essentialist view of black identity as a container for cultural and biological traits shared by all persons of African descent. He voiced these views, for example, during a speech on Afro-American history given at Harlem's Audubon Ballroom on January 24, 1965. Following the lead of both Padmore and Nkrumah, Malcolm saw black history as replete with evidence of the cultural unity of black humankind. Furthermore, he viewed knowledge of this past as essential to knowledge of one's true identity, knowledge of which would inspire new "energy" and "incentive" in the struggle for black liberation. But to see the real historical achievements of blacks, Malcolm said, one would have to ignore the "Negro History Week" version of "cotton pickers, orange growers, mammies, and uncles."<sup>33</sup>

Curiously, the version of black history that Malcolm offered in its place sounded much like that of Noble Drew Ali and Elijah Muhammad.

Before the age of colonialism, Malcolm said, the ancestors of modern blacks who peopled Africa, the Middle East, and India built great civilizations. While whites sat naked in Europe consumed by the hunger for "raw meat," blacks developed astronomy, the earth sciences, and architecture. Slavery, he argued, stole this cultural inheritance from the Africans. "They came here," Malcolm stated, "from a civilization where they had high morals; there was no stealing, no drunkenness, no adultery, fornication; there was nothing but high morals." When the slaves arrived, however, "they found a country that had the lowest morals" since it was filled "by prostitutes, by cutthroats." Slaveholders, Malcolm asserted, turned civilized Africans into their slaves by breaking up black families and contenting slaves with Jesus. The result was a people who "had no language, no history, no name."<sup>34</sup>

But, Malcolm argued in the style of Elijah Muhammad, the powerlessness and immorality of modern black Americans ran counter to their true nature as Africans. Echoing the essentialist racialism of Blyden and Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm stated:

The Black man by nature is a builder, he is scientific by nature, he's mathematical by nature. Rhythm is mathematics, harmony is mathematics . . . you've gotten away from yourself. But when you are in tune with yourself, your very nature has harmony, has rhythm, has mathematics. You can build. You don't ever need anybody to teach you how to build. You play music by ear. You dance by how you're feeling.<sup>35</sup>

This was quite similar to a statement that Malcolm had made just weeks earlier on December 16, 1964, at a gathering sponsored by the Harvard Law School: "When you hear a black man playing music, whether it is jazz or Bach, you still hear African music. The soul of Africa is still reflected in the music played by black men. In everything else we do we still are Africans in color, feeling, everything. And we will always be that whether we like it or not."<sup>36</sup> That Malcolm continued to view black identity in biologically and culturally essentialist terms was also indicated by his comments on intermarriage during this period. When asked by an interviewer for the British magazine *Flamingo* whether "mixed marriages promote better human relations," Malcolm answered thus: "Mixed marriages don't solve anything. What are the Black men trying to prove? Such 'Toms' really need psychoanalysis." In another interview with Pierre Berton taped on January 19, 1965, at CFTO-TV in Toronto, Malcolm conceded that

intermarriage was "one human being marrying another human being," but also asserted that it was an unnatural phenomenon—a "reaction that develops among the people who are victims of . . . [a] negative society."<sup>37</sup>

While Malcolm continued to define black identity in essentialist terms, he also argued for an Islam that transcended the bonds of any group identity. In fact, he almost presented Islam as a necessary corrective to his own racialism. "It is only being a Muslim which keeps me from seeing people by the color of their skin," Malcolm said during a speech given at the London School of Economics on February 11. "And the real religion of Islam doesn't teach anyone to judge another human being by the color of his skin . . . but the man's deeds, the man's conscious behavior, the man's intentions." Malcolm echoed this exact sentiment at nearly every speaking engagement during his last month, including a February 15 meeting at the Audubon Ballroom and a speech at the Cory Hill Methodist Church in Rochester, New York, on February 16.<sup>38</sup>

But Malcolm was always just as quick, as he was in Mecca, to remind his audiences that his commitment to this nonracialist tenet of Islam did not preclude his participation in a specifically black liberation struggle. In an address given on December 16, 1964, at the Harvard Law School, Malcolm stressed that "despite being a Muslim, I can't overlook the fact that I'm an Afro-American in a country which practices racism against black people. . . . [W]hether I'm Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, atheist or agnostic, I would still be in the front lines." While religion preaches brotherhood, Malcolm consistently said, most whites in America did not practice it. In an address at the Ford Auditorium in Detroit on February 14, 1965, Malcolm argued that "I'm for the brotherhood of everybody, but I don't believe in forcing brotherhood upon people who don't want it." Religion, Malcolm told *New York Post* reporter Timothy Lee on February 18, "is not enough. Today the problems of the Negro go beyond religion."<sup>39</sup>

This comment did not mean that Malcolm disbelieved in Islam or devalued his Islamic identity. But it did indicate that he defined Islam as a "religion" or a creed that could have limited impact in the achievement of his political goals. As a result, he chose pan-Africanism for his "politics" while grasping Islam as his "religion"; Malcolm viewed both identities as part of his own authenticity. But in holding to both, Malcolm made it impossible to integrate his "religious" values with his "political" beliefs, since his assumptions about the meaning of both pan-Africanism and Islam pitted them against each other in his own mind. On the one hand, his pan-Africanism was informed by a classic form of racial



essentialism—hence the comment that the black man's African behavioral traits would always be a part of him whether he liked it or not. On the other hand, Malcolm viewed Islam as a religion that could have nothing to do with a specifically racist political struggle, given its emphasis on non-racial unity. While it might be argued that Malcolm had found a perfectly reasonable method of balancing his "political" commitment to the black struggle with his "religious" beliefs in Islam, his bifurcation of religion and politics had important consequences for his ability to determine the direction of his own Islamic commitments.

### THE MEANING OF MALCOLM'S DOUBLENESS

Malcolm had ceded the authority to define the meaning of Islam (and hence, the authority to decide what was legitimately Islamic) to his missionary sponsors like Shawarbi and Azzam. For Malcolm, these men were synonymous with the "real" Islam. They spoke the language of the Qur'an, while he did not. They were also Arabs, a people whose "image is almost inseparable from the image of Islam," as Malcolm put it.<sup>40</sup> And they held the keys to Mecca, where Malcolm had experienced his second conversion and gained confidence in his own legitimacy as a "real" Muslim. It should come as little surprise, then, that Malcolm allowed them to define what was or was not the true Islam. Ramadan, Shawarbi, Azzam, and even Prince Faysal had made it clear to Malcolm that Islam paid no heed to race. If Malcolm were to practice the "true" Islam, they said, he could not appropriate Islam in an explicitly black struggle. Where Malcolm surrendered the ideological ground was in accepting this argument. Once he adopted their ideological requirements as a fundamental part of his own Islamic identity, he could use Islam only in a universalistic way to support a more general "human" liberation. He could not make an argument that appropriated Islam in any particularistic way. Put another way, if Islam could have nothing to do with issues of race, and Malcolm were a true Muslim, then he could not mix his Islam with his pan-Africanism.

A written exchange between Said Ramadan and Malcolm illustrated the fact that Malcolm seemed unable to break free of the ideas of his sponsors. Ramadan, the director of the Saudi-sponsored Islamic Centre in Geneva, had asked Malcolm in September 1964 whether it was true that "you still hold Black color as a main base and dogma for your drive under the banner of liberation?" If so, Ramadan wanted to know, "[h]ow could a man of your spirit, intellect, and worldwide outlook fail to see in Islam . . .

a message that confirms . . . the ethnological oneness and equality of all races, thus striking at the very root of . . . racial discrimination?" Some time between February 13 and 20, 1965, Malcolm composed a rather spirited reply, stating that "as a Black American I do feel that my first responsibility is to my twenty-two million fellow Black Americans." Malcolm then turned the tables on Ramadan, accusing the Muslim world of ignoring racism in the United States. He also repeated a charge that he had made while still in the NOI that Muslim missionaries focused on whites rather than blacks.<sup>41</sup> But Malcolm had no answer to Ramadan's main assertion, which was that Islam strikes at the "very root" of "racial discrimination" and thus represents the best solution for America's race problem. Malcolm believed such an assertion to be unrealistic. But because he had tied his legitimacy to Ramadan's own Islamic universalism, he could not offer any sort of *Islamic* approach to a more particularistic struggle.

At the same time, because of his essentialist views of black identity, he could not imagine a black struggle that operated across racial lines or that did not accentuate the particular needs of blacks. Since blacks around the world shared a common experience and common traits, he argued, they should join in a common struggle led by and for blacks. Such views blinded Malcolm to other possible strategies for black liberation that might pay more attention to the historical rather than essentialist meanings of blackness. If the need to defend an essentialist black identity had not been so great in his mind, perhaps he might have considered other strategies for liberation that were pan-Islamic, multiracial, or socialist.

In contemplating the meaning of Malcolm's assassination for American and Afro-American politics, some have speculated about how Malcolm would have reacted to the radicalization of the anti-war effort and the black struggle. It was, after all, less than a year since he had announced his official independence from Elijah Muhammad. I wonder, on the other hand, whether Malcolm might not have also broken away from his Muslim sponsors to develop his own Islamic response to black oppression that paid more attention to race without reifying any "essential" black traits. But assassins' bullets silenced Malcolm at the Audubon Ballroom on February 21, 1965. After this loss, it would take exactly a decade before another prominent African-American Muslim thinker would confront Malcolm's dilemma.

## Chapter 6

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### Wallace D. Muhammad (b. 1933), Sunni Islamic Reform, and the Continuing Problem of Particularism

#### INTRODUCTION

While Malcolm X has received the most scholarly attention of all the figures covered in this study, W. D. Muhammad has received the least.<sup>1</sup> Born the seventh son of Elijah and Clara Muhammad in 1933, Wallace grew up in the Nation of Islam as a member of Muhammad's "royal family." Like Malcolm, however, the future leader questioned the legitimacy of his father's teachings as early as the 1950s. By the 1960s, he had broken with his father in order to embrace Sunni Islam. Then, after the death of Malcolm X, he reconciled with the Messenger. Throughout that decade, he repeated the entire process, separating from the NOI at least twice, only to seek readmission into his father's flock. It was almost miraculous that by 1974 Wallace positioned himself as his father's successor.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter, I will show how Wallace Muhammad inherited the mantle of leadership from his father in 1975 and then led the movement through a remarkable transformation toward the universalistic interpretation of Islam that Malcolm had promoted in his final year. Specifically, this chapter will explore how, in less than a decade, Wallace Muhammad debunked the myth of Yacub, became an advocate of American patriotism, and aligned the NOI with Sunni Islamic teachings and the Arab Islamic world. In so doing, Wallace Muhammad faced questions not unlike those confronted by Malcolm X. How, for example, would he advocate a universalistic reading of Islam and simultaneously fight for black

liberation? Would he abandon black particularism altogether or, like Malcolm, try to keep his "religion" separate from his "politics"?

I will argue that unlike Malcolm, Wallace Muhammad first attempted to blend elements of black particularism with his belief in a universalistic Islam. Appropriating themes from the black consciousness movement, the leader linked the Muslim identity of his followers to that of an African Muslim ancestor named Bilal. But in associating Islam with this particularistic identity, he faced powerful opposition from his immigrant Muslim allies, who accused him of continuing the race-based Islam of his father. In the face of that criticism, the leader abandoned these black consciousness teachings by the 1980s, reaffirming what his immigrant allies argued was the only "true" Islam—a universalistic Islam impossible to associate with any particular group of human beings.

But in the 1980s, the leader again tried to put his own stamp on the practice of Islam among black Americans. Rather than explicitly combining black particularism with his universalistic vision of Islam, however, he claimed the right to interpret the seminal texts of Sunni Islam, including both the Qur'an and Sunna, in view of the particular historical circumstances in which African-American Muslims lived and practiced. This was a key moment in African-American Islamic thought and suggested a number of new directions. For Wallace Muhammad, it meant that African-American Muslims should avoid relying solely on immigrant and foreign interpretations of Islamic texts and instead form a comprehensive vision of Islam that focused on specifically black issues.

I will also argue, however, that as Imam Muhammad, as he would come to be called, set out to create his own original body of Islamic thought, he offered two competing visions of social change that seemed to pit a universalistic Islam against a particularistic black struggle. On the one hand, his official "Islamic" view stressed individual responsibility as the primary engine of lasting social change. On the other hand, when the Imam discussed various solutions to problems plaguing black people, he promoted collectivist solutions almost identical to those of his father. Whether these two differing visions were complementary in the Imam's mind was never made clear. Even more importantly, the Imam did not explain or justify his collectivist thought in terms of any interpretation of Islam. Though he had sounded the call for an African-American Islam that incorporated aspects of particularism into an overarching vision of universalism, he did not offer any details on how collective black struggle might be informed by or understood in terms of an Islamic perspective.

## WALLACE MUHAMMAD AS NOI APOSTATE AND LEADER

Born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1933, this son of Elijah Muhammad entered life at a tumultuous time for the Nation of Islam. Disputes among the leadership forced Elijah out of Detroit the following year, prompting the leader to seek refuge at Temple No. 2 in Chicago. As outlined in chapter 4, Chicago also proved to be a difficult place for Elijah Muhammad, who became an itinerant preacher from 1934 until the early 1940s. Then, in 1942, Elijah Muhammad was sent to prison, where he remained until 1946. As a result, Wallace Muhammad barely knew his father as he was growing up. His mother became his sole parent. During this time, Clara Muhammad also played a key role in sustaining the movement in her husband's stead and inculcated NOI values and beliefs in her children, as well.<sup>3</sup>

Once Elijah Muhammad rejoined the family in 1946, the movement began to expand significantly due in large part to the leader's successful efforts to build an organizational infrastructure. These efforts included the establishment of the University of Islam, where Wallace Muhammad attended school. An elementary and secondary school, the "University" offered standard subjects, religious education, and Arabic language. In addition to working sporadically at the Oxford Electric Co. from 1952 to 1954, Wallace Muhammad received his only formal education at this parochial institution. There, he studied Arabic with a number of native speakers, including a Palestinian named "Ibrahim," an Egyptian named "Kamil," and another Palestinian named Jamil Diab. Though Diab later led a movement in Chicago to discredit Elijah Muhammad, during this period Diab was actually in the employ of the Nation of Islam. According to Wallace Muhammad, Diab mostly taught Arabic language, although he occasionally introduced traditional Islamic concepts through his teaching.<sup>4</sup>

As a result, Wallace looked more and more to the Qur'an as a source of divine guidance. As a newly appointed minister of the NOI temple in Philadelphia, he began in 1958 to introduce his own Qur'an-based teachings to local followers. According to Wallace Muhammad, many NOI members expressed interest in this new focus on Qur'an, especially since he made certain that none of his statements directly contradicted his father's doctrines. According to E. U. Essien-Udom, his use of the Qur'an also increased his prestige as a movement leader among some members in Chicago. In fact, despite Malcolm's growing popularity with

the mainstream media, the "word" within the movement was that Wallace would succeed his father as leader of the NOI. Essien-Udom, whose account of the NOI remains the best ethnographic source on the movement during the 1950s and early 1960s, claimed that "[s]everal followers have told the writer that Muhammad assured them that 'Allah has chosen Minister Wallace to succeed him.'" Malcolm X himself may have believed this, as he seemed to indicate on December 12, 1958, when he introduced Wallace Muhammad as the son who was "following in the footsteps of his father." When Essien-Udom asked Wallace himself about the rumor, Wallace replied that the "followers have come to look upon me as the second man."<sup>5</sup>

In 1961, however, Wallace Muhammad's important moves toward leadership of the NOI temporarily came to an end when he had no choice but to serve out a prison sentence for draft evasion. His incarceration followed a long saga in the courts, which began in 1953, when Wallace had become eligible for the draft. At that time, he appealed to his local Chicago draft board for conscientious objector status and was successful. In 1957, he was then ordered to serve two years civilian duty at the Illinois State Hospital in Elgin. After he failed to report, however, the federal government brought charges against him during the following year in United States District Court, where he was indicted and convicted of draft evasion. In April 1960, Muhammad was sentenced to three years, and after a failed appeal, reported to the Sandstone Correctional Institution in Minnesota on October 31, 1961, to serve out his sentence.<sup>6</sup>

The NOI responded by depicting Wallace's sentence as the unjust persecution of the righteous. The December 1961 edition of *Muhammad Speaks* carried a story whose headline announced that "Courts Jail Muslim Ministers; Taught Negroes In Faith of Islam Religion!" Framing Muhammad's conviction as a religious issue, the paper went on to say that these religious "teachings . . . have been held to be criminal, although . . . demonstrations of racial violence such as lynchings . . . are regarded as 'loyal Americanism.'" Whether Wallace accepted such statements as true cannot be known, although he later described his time in prison as important to his own spiritual development. Sandstone, Wallace said, had afforded him the opportunity to study the Bible and the Qur'an more extensively than he had ever done before. It was also the first time, he stated, that he had begun seriously questioning his father.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, after he was paroled on January 10, 1963, Wallace Muhammad continued to support the elder Muhammad's movement. At the annual Savior's Day convention held on February 26, Wallace

attempted to address the gathered followers, only to be thwarted by Malcolm X, who had been left in charge due to Elijah Muhammad's ill health. This incident, among others, created tension between Malcolm and the rest of the "royal family," who felt that Malcolm was becoming far too powerful within the movement. Malcolm himself knew this and later that spring sought to defuse the situation by writing an apologetic letter to Elijah Muhammad. Curiously, however, the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* depicted the relationship between Wallace and Malcolm during this period as being a harmonious one. After Malcolm became convinced that Elijah Muhammad was guilty of adultery in late 1962, he turned to Wallace, of whom he "always had a high opinion. . . . I felt that Wallace was Mr. Muhammad's most strongly spiritual son," he wrote. "Always, Wallace and I shared an exceptional closeness and trust." According to Malcolm, Wallace simply confirmed during this meeting that his father was indeed the immoral man whom Malcolm had described and doubted whether anything could be done to defend him.<sup>8</sup>

After Malcolm's suspension in December 1963, Wallace became even more embroiled in the controversy surrounding his father's sexual behavior. According to Malcolm, it was Wallace who had told him about the Messenger's improprieties. On January 2, 1964, Elijah Muhammad sent a message to his son that Malcolm had implicated him in the whole mess. Wallace Muhammad then requested a trial before his father, but he was denied. After nearly half a year of isolation from the NOI, Wallace broke with his father in May 1964, a couple months after Malcolm had announced his own independence in March. While working odd jobs to pay his own bills, he also established the Afro-Descendant Upliftment Society, which he hoped to use to support himself. The organization was never a success, probably because Wallace was too busy worrying about his own safety. Like Malcolm, Wallace feared that he might be murdered, and on August 4, 1964, he went to the FBI and the local police hoping to obtain some protection from what he described as the "punch-your-teeth-out" squads in the NOI.<sup>9</sup>

After the assassination of Malcolm on February 21, 1965, Wallace kept quiet—at least for a little while. Five days later, on February 26, Wallace Muhammad approached the podium at the annual Savior's Day gathering in Chicago to reaffirm the legitimacy of his father's teachings. A short speech of five minutes, Wallace's mea culpa included a plea to be accepted once again by the NOI membership as a "brother." Such statements seemed quite disingenuous, given both the duress under which Wallace must have been operating and his actions in the following years.



From 1965 until 1971, Wallace was expelled from the movement at least twice and perhaps as many as three to four times. Whatever personal animosity existed between him and his father seemed to take the form of a running debate about the Islamic legitimacy of the elder Muhammad's teachings and the need to introduce more Sunni Islamic concepts into the movement.<sup>10</sup>

Given this, it is all the more remarkable and even curious that Wallace eventually inherited the mantle of leadership from his father. While Elijah Muhammad never publicly appointed a successor, he seemed to defer quietly to his son's efforts to secure his right to the throne throughout 1974 and early 1975. In New York, Wallace flatly told National Secretary Abass Rassoull and National Spokesman Louis Farrakhan that he would succeed his father and specifically warned Farrakhan not to interfere. By 1975, it seems that he had garnered the support of key members, including Muhammad Ali, Herbert Muhammad, Raymond Sharrieff, Farrakhan, and Elijah Muhammad, Jr.<sup>11</sup>

Mattias Gardell speculates that the FBI might have helped Wallace gain this position through its COINTELPRO operations. COINTELPRO was a child of the Cold War era, when the FBI regularly conducted counterintelligence operations against suspected Communists, white hate groups, and the New Left. These operations often worked in the following way: Bureau agents would penetrate the upper echelons of various social or political movements, spread dissension, and plant false information, hoping to destroy the movement from within. Beginning in 1967, however, the FBI expanded its COINTELPRO operations to include "Black Nationalist-Hate Groups." Encompassing nearly 360 separate operations, this effort represented the second largest COINTELPRO of all. And, according to Frank Donner, the Nation of Islam was at the top of the Bureau's list.<sup>12</sup>

In 1968, the FBI's field office in Chicago identified Wallace Muhammad as "the only son of Elijah Muhammad who would have the necessary qualities to guide the NOI in such a manner as would eliminate racist teachings." How much the FBI actually assisted Wallace in his bid for the position cannot be known due to key deletions in their files. But the Bureau seemed to do what it could. In a January 7, 1969 letter from the Director's officer to Chicago Agent Marlin Johnson, a Bureau official stated that after the death of Elijah Muhammad "a power struggle can be expected. . . . We should plan now to change the philosophy of the NOI to one of strictly religious and self-improvement orientation, deleting the race hatred and separate nationhood aspects." The Bureau also reiterated

that it viewed Wallace Muhammad as uniquely qualified to fulfill this task. Chicago Agent Johnson responded by initiating an investigation into Herbert Muhammad's tax returns, hoping to remove him "as a possible successor to his father as head of the militant black nationalist NOI."<sup>13</sup>

### WALLACE MUHAMMAD'S SUNNI REFORMATION OF THE NOI

Whether or not the efforts of the FBI helped Wallace Muhammad inherit the leadership of the NOI, he did carry out a program of Sunni Islamic reform that, in a few short months, almost completely changed the character of the NOI. The new leader made his first appearance as his father's successor during the annual Savior's Day convention on February 26, 1975, one day after the death of the seventy-seven-year-old Muhammad. In an address to an audience of more than twenty-five thousand people at the Chicago Amphitheater, he slowly laid the foundation of his "second resurrection" by beginning to debunk the beliefs regarding the divinity of NOI founder W. D. Fard. Fard, he explained, was not God himself but "the manifestation of God to the Honorable Elijah Muhammad." Over the following few years, he similarly reinterpreted almost all of his father's doctrines, claiming all the while that he was merely preserving the elder Muhammad's true legacy. The front page of the March 14, 1975 edition of *Muhammad Speaks* emphasized this idea, featuring a large photograph of Elijah Muhammad smiling down on his son, who was pictured in both meek and authoritative poses. The headline proclaimed, "He Lives On!"<sup>14</sup>

And yet, Elijah Muhammad's intellectual legacy, especially his idea of black chosenness, was clearly doomed. According to Wallace Muhammad, being black did not mean that one was a god or even a member of the chosen race; being black meant having the "black mind," which was a symbol for closeness to God. Moreover, he said, the Messenger never preached against another human being because of his or her skin color. No person, he paraphrased his father, should be hated on the basis of skin color alone: "The Honorable Elijah Muhammad has said Himself, and this is on record: 'We do not teach hate.'" Furthermore, Wallace continued, white people were not actually devils. "I'm not calling those people 'devil.' I'm calling the mind that has ruled those people and you 'devil.'" Killing the white devil, said Wallace, did not mean physically snuffing out his or her life. It meant making a white person relinquish his or her devilish ways. "You can destroy a devil," he asserted, "by destroying the mind



that the person has grown within them. If you can destroy the mind, you will destroy the devil." This allegorical destruction of racism was also similar, he argued, to what his father *really* meant in predicting the end of the world. Reinterpreting the passage of Ezekiel on which Muhammad based his belief that a Mothership would obliterate white humankind, Wallace argued that "Ezekiel saw this body as a wheel (Nation of Islam) in a wheel (world community), the Revelator saw it as . . . a divinely revealed community." It was this community's sheer moral force, the leader implied, that would destroy all the evil that whites had brought about in the world.<sup>15</sup>

Then, in a June 15, 1975 address to twenty thousand people at Chicago's McCormick Place, he announced that whites would be allowed to join the NOI. "There will be no such category as a white Muslim or black Muslim. All will be Muslims. All Children of God," said Wallace Muhammad. In explaining the change in a CBS News interview with Randy Daniels, Muhammad said that the NOI had banned whites previously because of their obsession with race or "color." While the NOI would continue to fight such thinking among whites, the leader said, "those . . . who identify with our thinking can come in and join us . . . in giving moral direction to the world." Of course, Wallace Muhammad realized that the number of white members wanting to join would never be very high. The decision was a symbolic one, allowing him to uphold the idea of nonracialism while knowing full well that his movement would remain predominantly black.<sup>16</sup>

Muhammad also concentrated on promoting the practice of the Old World Islamic tradition of Ramadan. As announced in an August 29, 1975 edition of *Muhammad Speaks*, he directed his followers to celebrate the dawn-to-dusk fast during the lunar month of Ramadan rather than during the Christian Advent season. While he acknowledged the usefulness of his father's policy of giving black Muslims something to celebrate in place of Christmas, Muhammad said that it had now come time to observe "the victorious completion of this fast with our Muslim Brothers and Sisters the world over." Later that year, on October 17, 1975, Muhammad used the front page of his movement's popular newspaper to invite "all Muslims in Chicago" to gather at McCormick Place for the traditional prayers preceding *id al-fitr*, the festival marking the end of Ramadan. Also in October, the leader demanded that *salat*, the ritual prayer performed by pious Muslim five times daily, be learned and practiced by movement members. Then, in 1977, as many as three hundred of Muhammad's followers performed the hajj as guests of the Saudi

government. The experience, as St. Louis resident Ahmed Ghani put it, was "a chance to see al-Islam in its universal perspective."<sup>17</sup>

In addition, Muhammad sought to align himself with the Arab Islamic world, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf States, who identified in Wallace yet another potential black Muslim ally. On June 29, 1975, Muhammad addressed a crowd of thousands at Madison Square Garden in New York. Many foreign dignitaries attended the gathering, although the movement newspaper singled out Amin Hilmy, ambassador of the Arab League, as particularly important. When President Anwar Sadat of Egypt visited the United States in October 1975, the movement newspaper covered the trip in three separate issues, highlighting pictures of movement members and President Sadat taken at receptions and in greeting lines. The November 14, 1975 edition dramatically depicted the movement's new focus on its partnership with the Arab Islamic world by including an illustration of Arab and African-American males stretching their hands out to each other over the Atlantic Ocean. Above this picture was written, "The Universal Nation of Islam." Interestingly, under Elijah Muhammad, the movement paper had previously featured a similar image of two black men stretching their hands out to each other. These identical men were situated in Asia and Africa respectively and their hands met over America, signifying the important role of American blacks in Elijah Muhammad's millennial vision. Under Wallace Muhammad's leadership, however, the image was used to stress interracial Muslim unity and the nonracial character of Islam. President Sadat officially recognized the relationship between Egypt and the organization by awarding the group twelve scholarships to Egyptian universities.<sup>18</sup>

Another change implemented by the leader involved his relationships with black Christians. Instead of attacking black Christian leaders, he sought closer ties with them, a transformation that produced more than a few ironies. For instance, at a tribute to the late Elijah Muhammad held on March 14, 1975, *Muhammad Speaks* columnist Ali Baghdadi sat on the dais next to the Reverend Jesse Jackson, whom he had harshly criticized only two months earlier in one of his columns. That same year, Jackson's Operation Push recognized the organization for its efforts to save the black family. In 1977, Ibrahim Pasha, one of Muhammad's closest advisers, joined the Reverend Benjamin Hooks, then executive director of the NAACP, in an interfaith tribute to the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. King, who had been dubbed a "foolish Uncle Tom" by the old Nation of Islam, was now recognized as one of the great African-American leaders. In 1978, Wallace Muhammad also called for interfaith cooperation in

not model minority

accomplishing similar social goals. Paraphrasing Qur'an 5:48, he called on believers to join "together as in a race toward all that is good. Not only Muslim with Muslim, but Muslim with Jew, Muslim with Christian. Let us all go together."<sup>19</sup>

1976  
American  
flag

By the 1976 celebration of Savior's Day, the leader even called for Muslims to involve themselves in American politics and flew the American flag over the meeting. Two years later, Wallace announced that the organization would celebrate "New World Patriotism Day" on July 4. It was, according to the movement newspaper, "another great and significant move in the reformation of the membership into outstanding examples of model American citizens." The American flag also appeared on the front page of the newspaper. And children attending the movement's school system recited the pledge of allegiance every morning. Then, in January 1979, a company run by Muslims closely associated with Wallace Muhammad called Salaam International inked a twenty-two million dollar contract with the United States Department of Defense to produce food packs for the military.<sup>20</sup>

1976  
1977

To symbolize these changes, Muhammad also altered the nomenclature of the movement. He was no prophet, he announced in a March 21, 1975 interview in *Muhammad Speaks*, but a *mujaddid*, literally a renewer of the faith. Moreover, he eschewed the title of "Minister" to become an "imam," a word in the African-American context that has come to mean a spiritual and administrative Muslim leader. By July 1975, he no longer called his father the "Messenger," but the "Master." And in February 1976, he renamed Temple No. 7 in Harlem after Malcolm X, who had done so much to build that institution but who had left it to become a Sunni Muslim. Then, in late October, the leader changed the name of the organization itself to the World Community of al-Islam in the West (WCIW). "We are not Black Muslims and never have been," he said in an interview with the *New York Times*. "We're not black separatists. We're a world community—a community that encompasses everybody... we are all just Muslims." In 1977, the Imam announced that movement temples would henceforth be called *masjids*, the Arabic word for mosque.<sup>21</sup>

1976  
WCIW  
1977  
temples  
to  
masjids

Despite this new era of interfaith cooperation and universalism, however, Muhammad did not abandon every perceivably particularistic aspect of the movement. Like his father, Imam Muhammad continued to criticize the harmful psychological effects of Christianity's depiction of Jesus as a white man. To counter this, Muhammad founded CRAID, the Committee to Remove All Images of the Divine in places of worship. CRAID was quite active during the latter half of the 1970s, staging

protests nationwide. Muslims would travel to high-traffic urban areas and display signs that linked feelings of white superiority and black inferiority to pictures of the white Jesus. CRAID thus offered a suggestive synthesis of Islamic theology and the struggle for black liberation. CRAID allowed believers to capitalize on older critiques of white Christianity as psychologically harmful to blacks. But rather than simply replace the white Jesus with a black version, as some African-American Christians and other African Americans had done since the nineteenth century, CRAID sought to banish images of God altogether. The goals of CRAID, then, were both particularistic and universalistic: on the one hand, protesters hoped to rid black America of the negative psychological consequences of a white God; on the other, they were also advancing their belief in the One God and their theological opposition to *shirk*, or the association of God with anything other than the Divine itself. In so doing, CRAID created a version of Islamic universalism that paid attention to specifically black concerns.<sup>22</sup>

### A UNIVERSALISTIC MUSLIM IDENTITY WITH PARTICULARISTIC ASPECTS

The same was true for the Imam's effort to redefine black Muslim identity. Though Imam Muhammad divorced himself from his father's biological views of blackness, he did adopt a definition of group identity that stressed black ties to the African continent and to an African Muslim ancestor in particular. In so doing, the Imam's leadership showed the influence of larger historical trends in the reconstruction of black identity during the 1960s and 1970s. The death of Malcolm X in 1965 marked the beginning of a period in which blackness came to be defined as a "cultural" identity that included "authentically black" expressions of art, literature, music, cuisine, coiffure, and language, among other traditions. Many African Americans, while still hoping to integrate into the economic and political fabric of America, embraced what they argued was a distinct African-American culture within the United States. For many, "soul," which might be manifested in "giving skin" or cooking traditional Southern dishes, became an essential element of African-American authenticity as did the specifically "African" aspects of blackness. Many young African Americans donned new "Afro" hairstyles and sported "bubas, caftans, agbadas, djellabas, and geles" designed with "colors and fabrics that would have seemed exotic even to their most resplendently attired [African] forebears." New rituals that emphasized this "cultural" definition of black

identity were also created during this period. In December 1966, US leader Ron Karenga celebrated the first Kwanzaa, an alternative holiday to Christmas that included the exchange of heritage symbols, the ritualistic lighting of candles, and communal drinking from the unity cup. In addition, Karenga advocated the teaching of Swahili to African-American youth.<sup>23</sup>

While the late 1960s are often associated in American historical memory with black political radicalism, it was these "cultural" aspects of the black revolution that attracted the most support from African Americans themselves, at least according to public opinion polls. For example, 21 percent of a pool of black interviewees polled by *Newsweek* in 1969 thought that a separate black nation-state should be formed. Thirteen percent of the same pool stated that they favored "community control" over integration as a way to succeed in America. In contrast, a 1970 *Time* poll conducted by Louis Harris showed that 85 percent of his interviewees endorsed black studies programs as important signs of "black identity and pride," while nearly half of the pool approved of the new Afro hairstyles. Around 40 percent of blacks polled in Detroit in 1968 indicated their approval of dashikis while 80 percent said they enjoyed soul food and music. Even if one discounts the accuracy of such instruments, the support for a culturally distinct black identity seemed remarkable.<sup>24</sup>

Black writers also sought to identify and contribute to this "self-consciously distinct and meaningful black culture in the United States" by contributing to a number of black publications, including *The Black World*, *The Journal of Black Studies*, *The Black Scholar*, and *Black Books Bulletin*. In addition, black intellectuals seized black history as one of the main forums of debate about black identity. These intellectuals focused both on the oppressive nature of slavery and how the African spirit survived and even triumphed through this oppression; characters like Gabriel Prosser, Nat Turner, and Harriet Tubman became key figures in this new black consciousness. Journalist Alex Haley made perhaps the most significant popular contribution to this genre of historical literature in writing his massive *Roots*. First published in *Reader's Digest* during 1974, the 688-page book told the story of how Haley's search for his own ethnic heritage led him back to a particular West African ancestor named Kunta Kinte. Releasing the book in 1976 after twelve years of research, Haley dedicated *Roots* "as a birthday offering to my country within which most of *Roots* happened."<sup>25</sup>

The irony of Haley's dedication should not be lost. *Roots* was not primarily a story about slavery, but an immigrant narrative that showed the

journey of the African-American people from West Africa to North America. Of course, the book gave a vivid account of the horrors of slavery, but it concluded as a triumphant narrative about the promise of America. "The story ends," wrote Nathan Huggins, "with that onward, upward, progressive vision fundamental to the American faith. Through *Roots*, black people could find a collective memory and be mythically integrated into the American dream." Haley did not celebrate his ancestor's story to illuminate differences between himself and white Americans but to show the similarities of their long journeys. "It is, ironically, because Americans take so much for granted among themselves that they can dramatize their differences comfortably," Werner Sollors has suggested. "Ethnic revivalism . . . only works in a context where values, assumptions, and rhetoric are shared."<sup>26</sup>

Also seeking to highlight the authentic "immigrant" identity of blacks, Imam Muhammad incorporated this brand of ethnocentrism into his own movement. On November 1, 1975, he announced that he would call himself "Bilalian," a term referring to Bilal ibn Rabah, an African companion of the Prophet Muhammad and the first *muadhdhin*, or prayer-caller, in Islam. Like Haley, Muhammad identified this ancestor as an exemplary model for African-American identity. According to Muhammad, Bilal was "a Black Ethiopian slave who was an outstanding man in the history of Islam. He was the first *muezzin* (Minister) [*sic*] of Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon Him). He was so sincere and his heart was so pure that the Prophet Muhammad and the other leaders of Islam under him addressed him as 'Master Bilal.'" African-American Muslims, the Imam argued, had a "double connection with Bilal because he was a Muslim and he was also a so-called African."<sup>27</sup>

The appropriation of Bilal, then, was not meant to separate black Muslims from their nonblack Muslim brothers and sisters, but merely to stake out a special place for them within the history of Islam. That Bilal was East African, and not from West Africa, where most African Americans claim their roots, was of no consequence. He was a viable symbol of black Muslim success. Bilal had thrown off the shackles of slavery by refusing to serve his master after taking the *shabada*, the declaration of faith that makes a person Muslim. His example was lauded in a number of sources, including biographies that are still read in various African-American Muslim communities.<sup>28</sup> Bilalian styles of dress, including the "Bilalian" fez, were marketed in the newspaper, which was also renamed in Bilal's honor. The *Bilalian News* children's page even featured a word puzzle about the historic figure. Printed next to an illustration of a man



performing the call to prayer, the puzzle read: "I was once a slave / Who was very brave / I was a man without fear / who gave the first prayer / in a land where Arabia lay / and though there were great odds / I was not afraid / to proclaim the religion of God. Who am I?"<sup>29</sup> Following the example of their leader, nearly every active member of the movement came to call themselves "Bilalian." Some outsiders, including the Reverend Al Sharpton, may have used the title as well.<sup>30</sup>

Around 1978 or shortly thereafter, however, opposition to Muhammad's appropriation of the African Muslim ancestor developed within the immigrant and foreign Muslim communities. This criticism emerged at the very time during which Muhammad had begun to cultivate closer ties with Sunni Islamic groups, (including the Muslim World League. Muhammad Ali al-Harkan, secretary general of the League from 1976 to 1983, had praised Imam Muhammad for the changes that he had implemented within the NOI. As a result, the Imam became an official consultant and trustee of *da'wa* activities sponsored by the Gulf States in America. Moreover, Wallace Muhammad developed a working relationship with the U.S.-based Muslim Students Association (MSA). Since its founding in 1963 at the University of Illinois, the MSA had become one of the best-organized Muslim associations in the United States. In the middle 1970s, it purchased a huge farm in Plainfield, Indiana (located between Indianapolis and Terra Haute), which would serve both as the headquarters of the MSA and its successor organization, the Islamic Society of North America, founded in 1982. Functioning as an umbrella organization through the 1970s, the MSA established a network of Islamic publishing concerns, properties, and member organizations including the North American Islamic Trust, the Islamic Teaching Center, the American Muslim Scientists and Engineers, and the American Muslim Social Scientists. In order to increase the number of formally educated Islamic clerics and missionaries in the United States, the MSA also helped to place these figures in various locations around the country.<sup>31</sup>

Wallace Muhammad hosted one such missionary. Through a relationship with El Tigani A. Abugideiri, a leading figure within the MSA, Imam Muhammad arranged for a Medina-trained Sudanese shaikh named Muhammad Nur Abdallah to serve as imam of his mosque in Chicago. In 1978, Abdallah first spent two weeks in Indiana with Abugideiri and then left for his assignment at the main mosque of the new WCIW. Once installed as imam, Abdallah preached the Friday *khuiba*, or sermon, wrote articles for *Bilalian News*, and taught believers the rudiments of Sunni

Islamic practice, including the prayers.<sup>32</sup> By installing Abdallah as the imam of his main mosque in Chicago, Imam Muhammad showed how serious his ties to the immigrant Muslim community had become. And when quiet opposition to "Bilalism" was voiced in the immigrant community, he decided to yield.<sup>33</sup> "We were experimenting . . . trying to find a solution to our identity problem," Wallace Muhammad said in a 1993 interview. "But Bilalian didn't work for us. We were charged with a division in Islam, of making Bilal our leader rather than the Prophet."<sup>34</sup> By redefining black identity in a way that claimed a particular historical space within the universalistic Islamic heritage, the Imam jeopardized his relations with some of his immigrant Muslim allies.

But rather than abandon the title immediately, the Imam defended the title on the grounds that it had little to do with Islam. "Bilalian," the leader tried to explain in an interview that appeared in the *Bilalian News* on November 16, 1979,

is not a religious name. We have adopted the name Bilalian as an ethnic name to replace other terms that we think are not as rich, ethnically speaking. They are not as rich because to identify with skin color is not as rich ethnically speaking as to identify with an ancestor who identified with a great ideology. . . . We don't identify with Bilal only because he was Muslim, it's mainly because he was an African ancestor.

Of course, this statement ignored his original intent in 1975 to offer a label that would incorporate his followers' "double connection" with Bilal, who was seen as equally black and Muslim. By 1979, the Imam claimed that he had actually chosen the term "mainly because he [Bilal] was an African ancestor" who also happened to serve as an exemplary ideologue. The explanation, however, did not satisfy Muhammad's critics. While many of his followers continued to call themselves "Bilalian" for some time afterward, Wallace Muhammad abandoned his ancestor, changing the name of the *Bilalian News* to *World Muslim News* in 1980.<sup>35</sup>

By giving up on this project during the early 1980s, Wallace Muhammad showed the extent to which he would go to maintain his integrity as a Sunni Islamic reformer in the eyes of his Muslim Arab allies. The costs in terms of African-American autonomy, however, could be quite high. Like Malcolm X, Wallace Muhammad relinquished an opportunity to insist on an interpretation of the Islamic heritage that paid attention to the particular interests and needs of many African Americans.

## ISLAMIC MODERNISM, CONTEXTUALIZED ISLAM, AND BLACK LIBERATION

But while he no longer tried to link any type of black particularism to his universalistic vision of Islam, he did lay a theoretical foundation for another kind of difference within Islam. This possibility emerged in the 1980s, as the Imam touted what might be seen as a form of "Islamic modernism." Originally crafted during the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Islamic reformers like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh of Egypt, Sayyid Ahmad Khan of India, and Allal al-Fasi of Morocco, Islamic modernism aspired to synthesize what its ideologues identified as the fundamental ideals of modernity with Islam. As John Esposito summarizes, "Islamic modernism did not seek to restore a pristine past but instead wished to reformulate its Islamic heritage in response to the political, scientific, and cultural challenge of the West. It provided an Islamic rationale for accepting modern ideas and institutions, whether scientific, technological, or political (constitutionalism and representative government)." Moreover, for al-Afghani especially, "Islam was the religion of progress and change, of reason and science, a religion with a strong work ethic." Perhaps most importantly for the history of Islamic thought, Islamic modernists often proposed to reinterpret centuries of Islamic tradition, including the *shari'a*, or the body of Islamic laws and ethics, by using *ijtihad*, or individual interpretation. While Islamic modernism was in part an apologetic, justifying the usefulness of Islam in a world where Muslims seemed increasingly irrelevant or powerless, it also represented an important attempt to preserve and reinterpret aspects of the Islamic heritage in light of radically changing historical conditions.<sup>36</sup>

In a move reminiscent of many Islamic modernists, Imam Muhammad presented Islam throughout the 1980s as a tradition compatible with notions of personal freedom, individualism, and democracy. "America," the Imam argued in a Pittsburgh television program taped in 1983, "is perhaps a place where the idea of freedom is developed to its highest degree." In one sense, he argued, this was advantageous, since "a person can come and can live their life and do whatever they want as long as they respect the laws of the land." But in another sense, he stated, one also has the freedom to be "uncivilized . . . to be tossed about in the winds." The proper antidote to the more destructive side of freedom, he said, was *jihad*, "not for the purpose of conquering lands or overthrowing nations . . . [but] for the purpose of liberating the higher instincts, the higher aspirations of man." A proper *jihad* might include the struggle to

become better educated, to lead by moral example, or to succeed in business. While this meant that change was left to the individual, he admitted, such voluntary effort was far better for a society than any imposed moral or religious codes.<sup>37</sup>

The individual's struggle for a life richer in things both sacred and profane is at the very heart of Islam, the Imam claimed in a 1987 interview on the same television program. Equating Islam to American democracy, the Imam argued that "our religion focuses on the individual as the best safeguard [for society]." The Qur'an, the Imam said, "is not a Book to call nations to a mission; it's a Book that calls individuals to life." By providing individuals with clear rules and daily rituals, the Imam stated, the holy book shows individuals how to "give their whole life to God. And in so doing, God lets you have your whole life." The perpetuation of Islamic religion itself also rests on the strength of an individual's practice, according to the Imam: "[An individual] should be able to come into a town where there's no Muslims and practice his religious life. . . . He should be able to conduct himself properly as a Muslim in business, properly as a citizen in the country, as a neighbor to his neighbor who is non-Muslim . . . he should be able to do all of that by himself." In defending his attitudes toward individualism, freedom, and democracy, the Imam turned both to the Qur'an and the *sunna*, the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad. Imam Muhammad argued that "if we find ourselves faced with great difficulty, we should turn not only to the Word of God in Qur'an, but we should also turn to the Seerah," or the biography of the Prophet. Prophet Muhammad, the Imam said, was a "universal model" whose reaction to any given circumstance could be used to understand and solve contemporary problems and dilemmas.<sup>38</sup>

For example, he applied the *sunna* to the question of Muslim participation in American democracy. Imam Muhammad argued that Islam "promotes democratic processes. It sanctions and encourages the democratic processes. In fact, our religion is a democracy." While he did not make clear exactly what it meant that Islam was a democracy, he said it was incumbent on Muslims to become active in politics and he suggested holding political awareness seminars to accomplish this end. "Our religion teaches us that we should be active and supportive of all the good things that a society has established," Muhammad stated in 1984 on the same program in Pittsburgh. This also meant that the Muslim should support the state by paying taxes and joining the military. In explaining the Islamic legitimacy of these views, the Imam utilized an important historical parallel to the early history of Islam. Muslims in America, he said, were



religious minorities, much like the Jews and Christians of Islamic Arabia. The Prophet Muhammad, according to the Imam, guaranteed these minorities the right to practice their religion as long as they contributed "to the common needs of that new society that was formed" including, for example, the payment of a mandatory tax. The arrangement made between the early Islamic state and its religious minorities offered an instructive lesson for Muslims in the United States, according to the Imam. "[I]f a Muslim state requires of non-Muslim citizens participation in the support for the general welfare of the state, then if a Muslim is in a non-Muslim state, he should accept to do the same." Such cooperation with the state assumed, the Imam noted, that the government "permits him to practice his religion" and to live a Muslim life. If, for some reason, the state no longer observed its duty to the Muslim citizen in this regard, the Imam said, then he or she was no longer obligated to support the state. In fact, the Muslim should be willing to take up arms in the fight for religious freedom. But for American Muslims, he argued, such a possibility was unrealistic. "[W]e trust," Muhammad stated, "that this country will remain civilized and protect the rights of Muslims, as it protects the rights of other minorities."<sup>39</sup>

The articulation of these arguments represented an important moment in the history of African-American Islamic thought. By looking to the *sunna* as a primary source for his own thought, the Imam hoped to apply the Prophet Muhammad's reasoning to the historical circumstances of African-American life. The Imam also argued that African Americans should confront these sources themselves, rather than relying on others to interpret them. Criticizing what he characterized as an unhealthy reliance by African Americans on charismatic leaders, including Father Divine and his own father, Imam Muhammad emphasized that believers needed only the Qur'an in their search for God. "They say, 'Well, what do you have here, Brother Imam, that makes you so special?'" the Imam asked rhetorically. "The Qur'an, the Word of God," he said. "You mean to tell me that just you, and the Word of God . . ." "That's right," the Imam interrupted himself. "Just me and the Word of God." For Imam Muhammad, the act of independent interpretation also required that blacks rely less on their non-black brothers and sisters. "It is not enough for God to tell us through another race, we still feel insecure," the Imam said. "We feel unapproved that we still have not been validated as a man. They are the master, and we are the boys." Obviously referring to immigrant Muslims, the Imam criticized an act of which he himself was clearly guilty—that is, relying on immigrant sponsors to determine what behavior was or was not legitimately

Islamic. In fact, he also called for the development of an African-American school of *fiqh*, or Islamic jurisprudence.<sup>40</sup>

But having defended his right to interpret the texts of Islam in his particular historical circumstances, he did not articulate any new "Islamic" approaches to the question of a particularistic black liberation. In fact, he downplayed issues of race and racism, arguing that blacks had suffered too long under an inferiority complex. Paraphrasing the Prophet Muhammad's last sermon, the Imam argued that "there is no superiority of a white over black or black over white. There is no superiority of . . . an Arab over a non-Arab. The only criteria in this religion is . . . Taqwa—faith in God and in good deeds." Denying that his own color had been a burden to him, the Imam implied that racism was like a mental ailment that the oppressed could treat with positive thinking. While he conceded that African Americans were "treated differently" than persons of other racial backgrounds, the Imam countered that "if you don't accept that anyone has the right to treat you differently, and as long as the law protects you, I think you shouldn't feel any burden." The courts had been doing their part, the Imam said; it was time for blacks to do theirs.<sup>41</sup>

At the same time, however, he argued that blacks should develop and celebrate a stronger sense of group identity. The Imam asserted, for example, that the "Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was very careful not to undermine or take away the native characteristics of people." According to the Imam, the Prophet indicated that people need not distance themselves from "any healthy development and growth that they had, whether it was ethnic or nationalistic." Rather, he continued, they should preserve their identity, as the Qur'an itself states: "[I]t is Allah who has made you a distinct people, tribes, etc., that you should know one another." God, according to the Imam, also showed divine approval for diversity by permitting the Quraysh, the tribe of the Prophet, to remain a distinct people after the advent of Islam. According to the Imam, someone might have said, "This is going to be a Universal message. I am going to get rid of this importance on Quraish." The Prophet did not do so, said the Imam. In fact, he argued, God even named a chapter in the Qur'an after the tribe.<sup>42</sup> Of course, the Imam did not remark—or choose to remark—just how much controversy the special status of the Quraysh generated in the era of classical Islam, a phenomenon mentioned in chapter 1. He also did not comment on the fact that he had argued elsewhere for the view of Islam as a "Universal message."

Moreover, when forced to articulate how this sense of group identity might benefit blacks, his own program of social change contained no

allusions whatsoever to Islam. In fact, his platform sounded exactly like that of Elijah Muhammad. In a Harlem address, Imam Muhammad decried the lack of "social unity" among blacks, which he identified as "what is wrong with us." In fact, the Imam stated, "if you were really Black as a race, if you were Black as an ethnic people, you would be able to progress in this country." In addition, the Imam said, many African Americans were immoral people, whose "dope traffic, prostitution, gambling, Black on Black crime . . . [and] unnatural sex" had rendered them impotent to effect social change. Moreover, the Imam advocated collective self-reliance and "bootstrapping" to correct the economic disparities between African Americans and other racial groups in the United States.<sup>43</sup>

Denying the existence of any fundamental disadvantage for blacks within the economic "system" of the United States, Muhammad called in 1983 for less dependence on the federal government and more cooperative ventures between African Americans. In fact, the year earlier he had begun a kind of cooperative buying club called the AMMCOP, the American Muslim Mission Committee to Purchase 100,000 Commodities Plus. While the cooperative was not officially dissolved until 1986, it never managed to achieve much success. Nevertheless, the Imam said, it was the responsibility of African Americans and not the government to reestablish a "tax base" in the inner city. "Muslims," he explained, "can't accept to live in the world and see other people develop in business and . . . just be employed waiting for other people to create an opening for them. Allah says: 'Seek the Hereafter with all means I've given you, but don't neglect your share of responsibility in the physical world.'"<sup>44</sup>

In effect, the Imam seemed to be advocating two methods of social change animated by different assumptions and values. On the one hand, his Islamic modernism placed the responsibility of moral and economic progress on the individual, who had been identified by the Qur'an, according to Wallace Muhammad, as the "best safeguard" for society. For the Imam, this focus on the individual reflected his notions of Islamic social justice and equality; that is, the Imam understood Islam as a tradition that values a person for his or her individual character and actions rather than any group affiliation. On the other hand, the Imam also understood Islam to sanction "ethnic" cohesiveness, which he said was lacking among African Americans. Here he seemed to indicate that the onus of social change was on the black community and not simply black individuals. But rather than offering his own solutions to the problems of black Americans *as a group*, the Imam advocated the implementation of his father's

program for black uplift—and he did not explain, as he had done so well in defending individualism, how this made sense in terms of Islam.

Put another way, the Imam understood values of individualism, acquisitiveness, and democracy as universalistic Islamic themes. Morality, economic success, and freedom were not the values of a particular people; they were the very organizing principles of humanity. And yet, African-American deficiency in these values, according to the Imam, was related to their blackness. African Americans, he said, possessed social problems that seemed to be particularly *black*. But since (for him) Islam could not signify values of social change tailored for one group or another, the Imam seemed unable to compose a program of social change in which Islamic values served as the basis for communal action. Rather, he relied on the race-oriented programs of his father, while still upholding the race-less values of Islamic universalism.

### IMAM MUHAMMAD'S LEGACY

In the span of less than a decade, Wallace Muhammad attempted to dismantle the black particularistic tradition of Islam that had been the most prominent strain of Islamic thought among African Americans since World War II. In its place, he asserted the primal importance of Sunni Islamic traditions and norms. Even more than Malcolm X, he distanced himself from the black messianist foundations of African-American Islam, including any essentialist notions of what it meant to be black. Instead, he attempted to redefine black identity in a way that incorporated blacks into both an American immigrant narrative and Islamic history. When forced to abandon this effort, he then sought to achieve a different goal: to create an interpretation of Islam specifically suited to the needs of contemporary African Americans. While he did not work out the details of this idea with regard to a collective black struggle for liberation, he had claimed an important right. Blacks, he said, should find an Islam whose meaning would be determined within the black community and whose focus would be on the betterment of black life. The defense of this idea represented a significant moment in the history of African-American Islamic thought, a moment whose implications I explore further in the following conclusion.

- 70–71; and Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America* (Chicago: Muhammad Mosque of Islam No. 2, 1965; reprint, Newport News: U.B. and U.S. Communications Systems, 1992), 236, 241 (page citations are to the reprint edition).
19. Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman*, 170–1, 174, 200, 230.
  20. For information on the production and editing of Muhammad's most famous work, see "Acknowledgements," in *Message to the Blackman*.
  21. *Message to the Blackman*, 19, and Elijah Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom: Solution to the so-called Negroes' Problem* (1957; reprint, Newport News, VA: *National Newport News and Commentator*, n.d.), 33.
  22. *Message to the Blackman*, 31, 110–122. Notice, too, how the timeline utilizes the number six, often interpreted by readers of the Book of Revelation as a sign of the Beast or Antichrist.
  23. *Ibid.*, 116–9, *The Supreme Wisdom*, 30; and cf. H. H. Garnet, "The Past and the Present Condition, And the Destiny of the Colored Race," in *Black Nationalism in America*, ed. Bracey, 115–120. In 1848, Garnet said that while Africans were basking in the light of civilization, Anglo-Saxons "abode in caves under ground, either naked or covered with the skins of wild beasts. Night was made hideous by their wild shouts, and day was darkened by the smoke which arose from bloody altars, upon which they offered human sacrifice."
  24. *The Supreme Wisdom*, 16, 18, 42–43, and *Message to the Blackman*, 3, 298.
  25. While it is not at all clear what Muhammad meant exactly by calling Fard the Mahdi, most Muslims believe that the Mahdi is a figure who will appear on earth to usher in an era of justice and true belief prior to the end of the world. As many traditions have it, he will hail from the Prophet's family; he will appear in a time of desperate need; and his appearance will be accompanied by fantastic signs. For Twelver Shi'ism, the most popular branch of Shi'i Islam, the Mahdi is said to be the twelfth Imam, perhaps hiding somewhere around Mecca. Some Muslims, however, have also believed in a Second Coming of Jesus Christ and have disagreed about whether this would be the same figure as the Mahdi. In addition, Muslims have posited that an Antichrist-like *Dajjal*, or deceiver, would wreak havoc on the whole earth for perhaps forty days or forty years near the end time. See Robert S. Kramer, "Mahdi," 18–19, and Abdulaziz Sachedina, "Messianism," 95–99, in vol. 3 of *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, in addition to William J. Hamblin and Daniel C. Peterson, "Eschatology," 440–442, in vol. 1 of the same.
  26. *Message to the Blackman*, 1–11.
  27. *Ibid.*, 88, 265–291.
  28. George Slusser and Eric S. Rabkin, eds., *Fights of Fancy: Armed Conflict in Science Fiction and Fantasy* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 2; Hadley Cantril, *The Invasion from Mars: A Study in the Psychology of Panic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), 55, 58–60, 71, 133, 180; Howard Koch, *The Panic Broadcast* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1970), 3; "Radio Listeners in Panic, Taking War Drama as Fact," *New York Times*, 31 October 1938, 1.
  29. Benson Saler, Charles A. Ziegler, and Charles B. Moore, *UFO Crash at Roswell: The Genesis of a Modern Myth* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 6,

- 10–14, 146–47; see also Leon Festinger et al., *When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group that Predicted the Destruction of the World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956).
30. *The Supreme Wisdom*, 26, 28–30, and *Message to the Blackman*, 304.
31. Louis A. DeCaro, Jr., *On the Side of My People: A Religious Life of Malcolm X* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 136–7, and Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism*, 80.
32. Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism*, 73–74, 313–19, and DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, 146–52.
33. Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism*, 317–19, and DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, 161–2.
34. Clegg, *An Original Man*, 136–42, and W. D. Muhammad, public address at Washington University in St. Louis, 9 October 1996.
35. Elijah Muhammad, *Muslim Daily Prayers* (Chicago: University of Islam, 1957).
36. "The Prayer Service in Islam," in *Muhammad Speaks*, 15 October 1962, 8, and *Message to the Blackman*, 136.
37. *Message to the Blackman*, 155.
38. "The Prayer Service in Islam," in *Muhammad Speaks*, 15 November 1962, 8; 30 November 1962, 8; and 31 January 1963, 8.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. See William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965–1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 245–6; *Malcolm X*, Warner Home Video, Burbank, 1992; and James H. Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993).
2. See Peter Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1979); Eugene Victor Wolfenstein, *The Victims of Democracy: Malcolm X and the Black Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Bruce Perry, *Malcolm: The Life of a Man Who Changed Black America* (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill, 1991); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 161–182; Clayborne Carson, *Malcolm X: The FBI File* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1991), 17–53; and Louis A. DeCaro, Jr., *On the Side of My People: A Religious Life of Malcolm X* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).
3. Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1987), 1–22. See also Carson, *Malcolm X*, 57–58; DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, 38–43; and Wolfenstein, *The Victims of Democracy*, 42–152.
4. See Malcolm X, *Autobiography*, 39–190; Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 161–182; Carson, *Malcolm X*, 58–60; and DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, 73–85.
5. See Malcolm X, *Autobiography*, 191–235, 236–287; Carson, *Malcolm X*, 60–64; and DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, 95–113.

6. See DeCaro, 156–158, 166–167, 322 nn. 18–19; letter of Malcolm X, *New York Amsterdam News*, 24 November 1962, 39; and letter from Malcolm X and Payne's reply, *New York Times Magazine*, 25 August 1963, 2.
7. Malcolm X, *Malcolm X: Speeches at Harvard*, ed. Archie Epps (New York: Paragon, 1991), 118–125.
8. See DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, 159–60, 201–2.
9. Ibid., 162, and FBI file 100–399321, sec. 9, 5/23/63, in Carson, *Malcolm X: The FBI File*, 237.
10. Carson, *Malcolm X*, 67, 69–70.
11. Malcolm X, *Malcolm X Speaks*, ed. George Breitman (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 18–21, and Malcolm X, *Malcolm X: Speeches at Harvard*, 140–142.
12. See Marc Ferris, "To 'Achieve the Pleasure of Allah': Immigrant Muslims in New York City, 1893–1991," in *Muslim Communities in North America*, eds. Yvonne Haddad and Jane I. Smith (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 215; Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 318; Perry, *Malcolm*, 261–264; and DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, 202–203.
13. See Reinhard Schulze, "Institutionalization [of *da'wa*]" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford, 1995), 1:343–346.
14. Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War, 1958–1964* (London: Oxford, 1965), 21–2, 53.
15. Reinhold Schulze, "Muslim World League," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, 3:208–210, and Perry, *Malcolm*, 352.
16. See Gutbi Mahdi Ahmed, "Muslim Organizations in the United States," in *The Muslims of America*, ed. Yvonne Y. Haddad (New York: Oxford, 1991), 14; and Larry Poston, *Islamic Da'wah in the West* (New York: Oxford, 1992), 79.
17. Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 320; Perry, *Malcolm*, 261–264; and Yaacov Shimoni, *Political Dictionary of the Arab World* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 105–6.
18. See Abd al-Rahman 'Azzam, *The Eternal Message of Muhammad*, trans. Caesar E. Farah (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993).
19. Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 331–333, and DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, 206.
20. Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 335, 340–1.
21. Ibid., 335, 348.
22. Ibid., 344–5.
23. See Immanuel Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement: A History of Pan-Africanism in America, Europe, and Africa* (New York: Africana Publishing, 1974), 3–4, 385–430; and George M. Fredrickson, *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 278–284.
24. See Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 349–51, and Carson, *Malcolm X*, 75.
25. *Malcolm X Speaks*, 61.

26. See *The Autobiography*, 353–360; Carson, *Malcolm X*, 75; and *Malcolm X Speaks*, 62–3.
27. *The Autobiography*, 352, 364.
28. See Carson, *Malcolm X*, 76–78, and Fredrickson, *Black Liberation*, 290.
29. *Malcolm X Speaks*, 72–77.
30. See DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, 233, 238–9.
31. Perry, *Malcolm*, 322, and DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, 239–41, 336 n. 17.
32. See Carson, *Malcolm X*, 79–80, and Malcolm X, *February 1965: The Final Speeches*, ed. Steve Clark (New York: Pathfinder, 1992), 20–1.
33. See Malcolm X, *Malcolm X on Afro-American History* (New York: Pathfinder, 1990), 11–23.
34. Ibid., 27–46.
35. See Ibid., 30–31.
36. *Malcolm X: The Speeches at Harvard*, 182.
37. *February 1965: The Final Speeches*, 44; and *Malcolm X Speaks*, 197.
38. *February 1965: The Final Speeches*, 46, 84, 140, 148–149.
39. *Malcolm X: The Speeches at Harvard*, 164; *February 1965: The Final Speeches*, 104, 182.
40. *February 1965: The Final Speeches*, 255.
41. Ibid., 252–253.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1. Since 1975, Wallace Muhammad has changed the spelling of his name a number of times in addition to using an Arabic name, "Warithuddin." For the sake of simplicity, I have used his given name throughout this chapter.
2. See Zafar Ishaq Ansari, "W. D. Muhammad: The Making of a 'Black Muslim' Leader (1933–1961)," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 2, no. 2 (1985): 248–262; and Claude Andrew Clegg III, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 245.
3. E. U. Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 81–82; Ansari, "W. D. Muhammad," 245–253; and Clegg, *An Original Man*, 98.
4. Ansari, "W. D. Muhammad," 253–258; Wallace D. Muhammad, interview by author, 8 October 1996, St. Louis, MO; and Imam Darnell Karim, telephone conversation with author, 22 January 1997, Harvey, IL.
5. Wallace D. Muhammad, interview, 1996, and Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism*, 81.
6. Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism*, 267–8.



7. See *Muhammad Speaks*, December 1961, 32, and Clegg, *An Original Man*, 181–2.
8. FBI File 100–399321, sec. 8 in Clayborne Carson, *Malcolm X: The FBI File* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1991), 68, 322, and Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine, 1987), 296–7.
9. Clegg, *An Original Man*, 206; Mohr to DeLoach, 2/25/65, FBI File 100–399321, sec. 16 in Carson, *Malcolm X*, 393–4; and SAC New York to FBI Director, 8/17/64, quoted in Clegg, *An Original Man*, 222–224.
10. Clegg, *An Original Man*, 245, 333 n. 15.
11. *Ibid.*, 273–6.
12. Mattias Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad: Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 101, and Frank T. Donner, *The Age of Surveillance: The Aims and Methods of America's Political Intelligence System* (New York: Knopf, 1980), 178, 212–3.
13. See SAC Chicago to FBI Director, 100–35635-B, 4/22/68, as quoted in Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad*, 101; Donner, *The Age of Surveillance*, 213; and FBI file 100–448006–626, 1/22/69, as quoted in Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad*, 101.
14. See “Elijah Muhammad Dead: Black Muslim Leader, 77,” *New York Times*, 26 February 1975, 1, and “Saviour’s Day Address,” *Muhammad Speaks*, 14 March 1975, 1.
15. Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad*, 103–5; “First Official Interview with the Supreme Minister,” *Muhammad Speaks*, 21 March 1975, 12; *Muhammad Speaks*, 16 May 1975, 13, quoted in Martha F. Lee, *The Nation of Islam: An American Millenarian Movement* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1988), 85; and *Muhammad Speaks*, 11 July 1975, 13, also quoted in Lee, *The Nation of Islam*, 86.
16. Paul Delaney, “Black Muslims Will End Longtime Ban on Whites,” *New York Times*, 17 June 1975, 9, and “Nation of Islam: The Alternative Culture for America,” *Muhammad Speaks*, 25 July 1975, 1.
17. Muhammad Nur Abdallah, interview with the author, 12 January 1995, St. Louis, MO, and Edward Curtis, “Islam in Black St. Louis: Strategies for Liberation in Two Local Religious Communities,” *Gateway Heritage* 17, no.4 (spring 1997): 39. Both Abdallah and Ahmed Ghani were interviewed as part of a larger oral history project conducted by the author in some of St. Louis’ Muslim communities.
18. *Muhammad Speaks*, 18 July 1975, 4, quoted in Lee, *The Nation of Islam*, 87; *Muhammad Speaks*, 31 January 1975, 1; and Clifton E. Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Transition from Separatism to Islam, 1930–1980* (Metuchen: Pathfinder, 1984), 96–7.
19. *Muhammad Speaks*, 17 October 1975, 3; “Interfaith celebration to highlight M. L. King Jr. Tribute,” *Bilalian News*, 14 January 1977, 20; *Bilalian News*, 28 January 1977, 2; and “Historic Atlanta Address,” *Bilalian News*, 29 September 1978, 17.
20. Lee, *The Nation of Islam*, 91; D. A. Williams and E. Sciolino, “Rebirth of the Nation,” *Newsweek*, 10 March 1976, 33; *Bilalian News*, 3 March 1978, 3, quoted in Lee, *The Nation of Islam*, 96; Steven T. Smith, “An Historical Account of the American Muslim

- Mission with Specific Reference to North Carolina,” (master’s thesis, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1984), 102; and Lee, *The Nation of Islam*, 97.
21. See “First Official Interview with the Supreme Minister of the Nation of Islam,” *Muhammad Speaks*, 21 March 1975, 3; Charlayne Hunter, “Black Muslim Temple Renamed for Malcolm X; Move Reflects Acceptance of Ex-Leader,” *New York Times*, 2 February 1976, 1; “Nation of Islam Changes name to Fight Black Separatist Image,” *New York Times*, 19 October 1976, 10; and Lee, *The Nation of Islam*, 93.
22. Curtis, “Islam in Black St. Louis,” 41.
23. See William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965–1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 171–2, 192–8, 245–6, 292–3.
24. *Ibid.*, 17–8.
25. See J. David Hoeveler, Jr., *The Postmodern Turn: American Thought and Culture in the 1970s* (New York: Twayne, 1996), 120; Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon*, 272–5, 292–3; and Alex Haley, *Roots* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976).
26. Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Black Odyssey: The African-American Ordeal in Slavery* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), xlviii, and Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford, 1986), 13–14.
27. This announcement appeared in several issues of the *Bilalian News*, including 7 November 1975.
28. See Muhammad Abdul-Rauf, *Bilal ibn Rabah: A Leading Companion of the Prophet Muhammad* (N.p.: American Trust Publications, 1977); *Bilal: The First Moezzin of Islam*, trans. Z. I. Ansari (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1976); and H. A. L. Craig, *Bilal* (London: Quarter Books, 1977).
29. *Bilalian News*, 9 January 1976, 32; *Bilalian News*, 28 November 1975, 25.
30. Imam Samuel Ansari, interview by the author, 29 March 1994, St. Louis, MO.
31. Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad*, 108, and Gutbi Mahdi Ahmed, “Muslim Organizations in the United States,” in *The Muslims of America*, ed. Yvonne Y. Hadad (New York: Oxford, 1991), 14–16.
32. Muhammad Nur Abdallah, interview by the author, 12 January 1995, Islamic Center of Greater St. Louis (on the campus of St. Louis University), St. Louis, MO. Abdallah is now leader of a mainly immigrant mosque located on Weidman Road in the St. Louis suburbs.
33. I dub it “quiet” opposition because no extensive public record of the incident exists. Further, neither Muhammad nor Abdallah has named the immigrant critics. Apparently, the critics preferred to take care of this matter without a public row.
34. W. D. Muhammad, interview by the author, 19 December 1993, Airport Hilton Hotel, St. Louis, MO. I was invited by St. Louis leader Samuel Ansari to interview the leader with a small group of reporters before he gave a public address.
35. See Wallace Deen Muhammad, “On the name Bilalian,” *Bilalian News*, 16 November 1979, 17, and Lee, *The Nation of Islam*, 98.



36. See John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (New York: Oxford, 1992), 55–7; Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); and Marshall G. S. Hodgson, "The Islamic Heritage in the Modern World," in *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 3:163–441.
37. W. Deen Mohammed, *Focus on Al-Islam: A Series of Interviews with Imam W. Deen Mohammed in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* (Chicago: Zakat Publications, 1988), 35–7.
38. *Ibid.*, 95–6, 100.
39. *Ibid.*, 4, 45, 48–9, 37.
40. W. D. Muhammad, *Imam W. Deen Muhammad Speaks from Harlem, N. Y.: Challenges that Face Man Today* (Chicago: W. D. Muhammad Publications, 1985), 29–36.
41. Mohammed, *Focus on al-Islam*, 38, 49–51.
42. Muhammad, *Imam W. Deen Muhammad Speaks from Harlem, N. Y.*, 68–70.
43. *Ibid.*, 116–7, 123–5.
44. Lee, *The Nation of Islam*, 100, and Mohammed, *Focus on Al-Islam*, 21.

### NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

1. Mattias Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad: Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 119–123.
2. *Ibid.*, 125; Judith Cummings, "Black Muslim Seeks to Change Movement," *New York Times*, 19 March 1978, 12; and "Black Books Bulletin Interviews Minister Abdul Farrakhan," *Black Books Bulletin* 6, no. 1 (1978): 44.
3. Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad*, 125, 129–33.
4. *Ibid.*, 192, 138, 128–9.
5. "Sending a Message, Louis Farrakhan Plays Mendelssohn," *New York Times*, 19 April 1993, C11, C16.
6. "Imam W. D. Muhammad joins Farrakhan followers at Saviours' Day," *The Final Call: On-Line Edition*, 27 February 1999, ([www.noi.org/press-events/press02-27-99.html](http://www.noi.org/press-events/press02-27-99.html)) 19 February 2001.
7. "Farrakhan Welcomes Islamic Scholars From Around World," *The Final Call Online*, 25 February 2000, ([www.noi.org/press-events/press-sd2k-25-2000.htm](http://www.noi.org/press-events/press-sd2k-25-2000.htm)) 1 March 2001.
8. "Final Communiqué from the Second Islamic Peoples Leadership Conference Held in America," *Nation of Islam Online*, 24–27 February 2000, ([www.noi.org/press-events/islam\\_conf\\_communique2-28-2000.htm](http://www.noi.org/press-events/islam_conf_communique2-28-2000.htm)) 19 February 2000.

9. "Remarks by the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan of the National [sic] of Islam, at the Million Family March," *Unification Home Page*, 16 October 2000, ([www.unification.net/news/news20001016.html](http://www.unification.net/news/news20001016.html)) 1 March 2001.
10. "Forward," in *Million Family March: The National Agenda*, ([www.millionfamilymarch.com/agenda/default.html](http://www.millionfamilymarch.com/agenda/default.html)) 1 March 2001.
11. "The Muslim Program," *Nation of Islam Online*, ([www.noi.org/program.html](http://www.noi.org/program.html)) 1 March 2001.
12. "Remarks by the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan," 16 October 2000.
13. "Giving New Meaning to Race," *The Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan Speaks*, ([www.finalcall.com/MLFspeaks/race.html](http://www.finalcall.com/MLFspeaks/race.html)) 19 February 2001.
14. Noble Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple* (Chicago, 1927), 37.
15. W. Deen Mohammed, *Focus on Al-Islam: A Series of Interviews with Imam W. Deen Mohammed in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* (Chicago: Zakat Publications, 1988), 48.
16. Farid Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation, and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), 12–3.
17. "Review of *Qur'an, Liberation, and Pluralism*," *Islamic Gateway*, 4 March 1998, ([www.ummah.net/bicnews/BICNews/Books/books15.htm](http://www.ummah.net/bicnews/BICNews/Books/books15.htm)) 2 May 2001.
18. W. D. Muhammad, interview by author, 19 December 1993, St. Louis, MO.
19. Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation, and Pluralism*, 60.