A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE NATION OF ISLAM AND ISLAM

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2007

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ABSTRACT

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This study compares the Nation of Islam with the religion of Islam to understand the extent of its religious kinship to Islam. As with other religions, there are various understandings of Islam and no single agreement on what constitutes being a Muslim. With regard to that matter, the Nation of Islam’s (NOI) teachings and beliefs are regarded as unconventional if viewed from the conventions of Islam. Being unconventional in terms of doctrines and having a focus on racial struggle rather than on religious nurturing position the Nation of Islam more as a social movement than as a religious organization. Further, this raises a question, to some parties, of whether the NOI’s members are Muslims in the sense of mainstream Islam’s standard. It is the issue of conventional versus unconventional that is at the core of this study.

The methodologies used are observation, interview, and literary research. Prior to writing the thesis, research on the Nation of Islam in Toledo was conducted. The researcher observed the Nation of Islam in Toledo and Savannah, Georgia, and interviewed some people from the Nation of Islam in Toledo and Detroit as well as a historian of religion from Bowling Green State University. The research questions are around the teachings and beliefs of the Nation of Islam in the past and today, the development of the Nation of Islam, and how its members see themselves and their organization both in relation to race relations in the United States and to Islam as a religion of Muslims worldwide.

The result of the research indicates that the Nation of Islam has gradually taught the teachings of Islam as embraced by the Muslim world while continuing to hold to the
teachings of Elijah Muhammad in contradiction with the accepted conventions of Islam. It is hoped that the research will have important implications for the American public’s view of the Nation of Islam and of Islam, to the Nation of Islam itself, and to other Muslims who do not belong to it in their understanding of each other’s differences and of the factors that lead to them. There are two implications. The first implication is to correct American people's perception of the Nation of Islam as a racist and anti-white organization (if it has changed). The second implication is to create mutual understanding and brotherhood among the Nation of Islam and other Muslims in the United States and other countries so that they can cooperate in positive activities that may help clear Islam’s image as a religion which loves peace and never suggests hatred, racialism, or even terrorism often pointed out to Islam.

Hence, this thesis is aimed at the understanding of the Nation of Islam as what leads to its radical views that are often considered by the American mainstream as provoking racism and separatism. America has made the Nation of Islam as it has been. This thesis is also aimed at the mutual and dual process of learning and understanding for both the Nation of Islam and the so-called “orthodox” Muslims. The unique circumstances of the African American diaspora work as the background of the NOI’s ideology that sets it apart from the rest of the Muslim world. It must be understood that Islam as a universal religion for all people never suggests hatred (even less terrorism) and superiority of a people (race) over the other(s). At the same time, however, it is necessary to understand the Nation of Islam’s insistence on black power, pride, and self-reliance when the American system is not in favor of many poor blacks whose voices are unheard.
FRONTISPIECE

“We should realize that the first identity is not an African or a European or a Saudi. The first identity is a human being. As long as we build our differences, our diversities (pardon me) upon the foundation that God gives us, the human foundation, we’re in a good shape. And we should just make all the progress we can, separately and all together” (Warith D. Mohammed, as told to This Far By Faith, producer Valerie Lison, 2003).
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to thank Allah SWT for the life, guidance, and blessings He gives. I am very grateful to my thesis advisor, Dr. Lillian Ashcraft-Eason, who has been with me from the first day of my research on the Nation of Islam until I finally completed the writing of this thesis. Without her guidance, recommendations, and personal contacts, it would have been impossible for me to conduct oral interviews with members of the Nation of Islam; conferences with her about the arrangement and interpretation of my data were invaluable, giving me confidence as I proceeded to write this Master’s thesis based on both literary and oral research. When I was just in the second semester in American Culture Studies (ACS) at Bowling Green State University (BGSU), my first year in the U.S., Dr. Ashcraft-Eason was the most supportive professor who made time for me whenever I needed her help, and she (and her late husband, Dr. Djisovi Eason who also taught at BGSU) took me to the Nation of Islam in Savannah during Spring Break 2005. Thank you very much for your support and encouragement, Dr. Ashcraft-Eason.

Next, I would like to thank my second committee member, Dr. Awad Ibrahim, for his willingness to help and guide me in the process of writing and finishing this Master’s thesis. Dr. Donald McQuarie, my graduate advisor in ACS, is to be especially thanked for his sincerity and patience in assisting me through the bureaucratic process of graduate study in the United States and in helping me review my thesis prior to its submission. In addition I would like to thank Gloria Pizana, secretary of the department, whom I often ask for help with school-related administration. I am also very grateful to the Fulbright Program (IIE)—as well as AMINEF Indonesia—for without its financial support, I would not have been able to pursue my study. There are people that I thank for sharing their
insights and knowledge of the Nation of Islam, including Dr. Devissi Muhammad (University of Detroit Mercy), Dr. Djisovi Eason, and Vincent Muhammad (Assistant Minister of the NOI’s Muhammad Mosque in Toledo). Also, I would like to thank Polly O’Rourke, Shannon Bischoff, and Yosuke Sato from Linguistics Department, Ph.D. Program, at the University of Arizona for helping me edit my thesis.

To my family, you have my eternal appreciation for your ever-lasting support, encouragement and love and for your trust. Thank you, Ibuk (mother), for always supporting me in pursuing my dream and for letting me do what I want to do. Thank you, Bapak (father) and Mbak Yuli (sister), for always being next to my mother in supporting and trusting me, and thank you, Mbai (late grandmother), whose love always reminds me of loving all human beings despite religious and cultural differences and to never forget God because of Whom I exist. Thanks to my husband, Yosuke Sato, for never being tired of encouraging me when I felt like giving up, for always being with me when I am sad, and for helping me go through all difficulties and troubles in my life and study. Your love is my strength.

And finally I would like to thank my best friend Esti, who despite being a thousand miles away—separated by oceans—has always been willing to help me, responding to my calls at anytime, hoping for nothing in return. You teach me what true and sincere friendship is.
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INTRODUCTION

The Nation of Islam (NOI) has been a quasi-religious, sociopolitical, and cultural organization addressing the problems of African Americans. Internal conflicts, divisions, transformation, and external criticism have spanned throughout its history. In its struggle toward the improvement of African Americans’ lives, the Nation of Islam has focused on its own race rather than its religion (Islam) and, thus, has centered on the race-themes of a collective movement of an oppressed group of people as supposed to the religious themes of Islam. That makes it a social movement rather than a solely religious organization. However, it sees Islam as salvation or way out of racial oppression when it feels that Christianity as white religion cannot help African Americans.

There are at least two reasons why the Nation of Islam adopts Islam as a tool in its social movement’s struggle. First, if Christianity is considered as white people’s religion, then Islam (compared to other non-Christianity religions) as a non-European and non-(white) American religion and (what is often seen) as the opposite of Christianity is considered as non-white. The ineffectiveness of Christianity in solving the problems of African Americans—due to its manipulation by white people to maintain human’s enslavement and justify racism—requires something else that is non-Western (non-Euro-American) as an alternative. Islam is chosen to give African Americans in the Nation of Islam a non-white identity, thus to separate themselves from their oppressor and their oppressor’s identity. Second, by considering Islam as the natural religion of African people, the adoption of Islam connects the Nation of Islam’s members with their heritage as Africans or black people. By tracing the history of Africa as the origin of some of the earliest civilizations and religions, and Africans as the first people on earth, as suggested
by a substantial number of major anthropological studies, fossil records, and DNA scientific tests on the fossils of the earliest human ever inhabited the world, the Nation of Islam tries to heal the self denial “disease” of African Americans as a result of a long oppression in slavery and the resulting sense of black inferiority by encouraging them to be proud of themselves.

Hence, by adopting Islam as an alternative to Christianity for salvation, the Nation of Islam and its members consider themselves to be Muslims—believers of Elijah Muhammad and his teachings. C. Eric Lincoln (1994) in *The Black Muslim in America* gives the following definition of true believers of the Nation of Islam, the so-called Black Muslims (although not all Black Muslims are necessarily its members).

Who are these faithful, these true believers, these Black Muslims? Most simply, a Black Muslim is an African American who is a follower of Elijah Muhammad, “Spiritual Leader of the Lost-Found Nation in the West.” Black Muslims are distinguished from orthodox Moslems not in the mere spelling of the word (strictly speaking, either form is correct) but in their belief that the leader, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, is the Messenger of Allah, directly commissioned by Allah himself, who came in person (under the name of Fard) to wake the sleeping Black Nation and rid them of the whites’ age-old domination (Lincoln, 1994, p. 20).

Because religion is not the focus of its movement, it does not matter for the Nation of Islam and its members whether other Muslims view them as Muslims, as pointed out by Lincoln. “The Muslims are not recognized by orthodox Moslems in this country, but they consider themselves Moslems and are apparently so considered by the many Moslems
countries in Africa and the Middle East that have welcomed and honored their leaders” (Lincoln, 1994, p. 27). Unlike Muslims in the United States, Muslims abroad may not really know about the Nation of Islam and its doctrines which are rejected by mainstream Muslims in America. Some may slightly know about the Nation of Islam, but they accept it because there are only a few groups of American Muslims of non-immigrant origin and the Nation of Islam represents a form of American Muslim religion. That acceptance is followed by the hope that the Nation of Islam will be embraced by larger Islam which could use the Nation of Islam to support the growth of Islam in the United States or to slowly inject Islamic elements to the periphery of American society (of mainly poor African Americans) where Christianity can not fully take effect.

With respect to the Nation of Islam’s members’ regarding themselves as Muslims, it might be justified remembering that there is no single understanding of what constitutes a Muslim, as neither is of understanding Islam. In the most basic term, a Muslim can be defined as the follower of Islam. Since the Nation of Islam adopts Islam, its followers call themselves Muslims. In a sense, the adoption of Islam by the Nation of Islam based on the unique life circumstances of African Americans—as opposed to a religious calling to a faith—distinguishes the adoption of Islam by Warith Deen Mohammed’s reformed Nation of Islam (today’s Muslim American Society). Having evolved away from his father’s Nation of Islam, Warith Deen Mohammed took a further step by thoroughly transforming the organization based on a deeper understanding of Islam. He adopts Islam not only as a means of social movement for African Americans (as the Nation of Islam does) but also as a faith that comes with the whole package of fundamental teachings.
beliefs, and practices as universally followed by the Muslim world with the conventional practice of Islam which is referred to by some as “orthodox” Islam.

Furthermore, being Muslim in the understanding of the Nation of Islam’s members may be interpreted loosely—meaning that it is not necessarily tied with being Muslim in the standard of conventional Islam or even not necessarily embracing Islam—and not necessarily the same as what other Muslims understand. In a loose interpretation, being Muslim for some African Americans may be just a term signifying cultural and racial symbols as African descendants with a consideration of Islam as African “true religion” and, thus, departs from recognition for heritage and racial identity rather than for religious kinship. This argument is supported by Gayraud S. Wilmore (1998) in *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*. In his description of the Nation of Islam in the 1960s as one of the organizations exemplifying the dechristianization of black radicalism in the mid-twentieth century, he writes:

Islam, the religion of “peace, justice and equality,” was commended to blacks as the faith by which the race could achieve fellowship—for all black persons are Muslims, whether they know it or not, and only their true religion could give them knowledge and power to stand up to whites…Many blacks who followed Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as at least nominal Christians, joined the Nation of Islam, or changed to Arabic or African names—considering themselves Muslims without formally uniting with a mosque (Wilmore, 1998, p. 203).

The Nation of Islam was born of the sufferings of African Americans and has matured via their continued resentment and disappointment. Born in the Great Depression
in 1930, going through the trials of the tumultuous era of American race-relations in the 1960s, internal conflicts in the 1960s, 1970s, and through ideological and intellectual growth, the Nation of Islam survives as one of the largest and the most important African American social movements with an invaluable role. Wallace Fard, Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, Warith Deen Mohammed, and Louis Farrakhan—despite ideological differences and controversies—are all important figures who make considerable contributions in improving the lives of African Americans.

Notwithstanding its ideological and theological differences from Islam, the Nation of Islam is gradually adopting the teachings of Islam as embraced by Muslims worldwide, though at the same time it continues to preserve its founder’s teachings. One day the Nation of Islam may, or may not, dismantle its controversial doctrinal beliefs and views and submit to Islam. Some people question whether its members are Muslims from the standpoint of the so-called “orthodox” Muslims who follow the convention of Islam, some argue that they are not Muslim, some are not sure, while some others argue that they are Muslims though are not necessarily the same as other Muslims in the standard of the conventional Muslim world.

One may question what the Nation of Islam shares with Islam for it seems that the comparison between the two reveals more differences than similarities. The answer is, despite the reinterpretation of Islam by the Nation of Islam due to African Americans’ unique life circumstances that brings about differences in terms of fundamental doctrines, the Nation of Islam still has little in common with Islam. As an organization bearing the name Islam and using Islam as religious reference, the Nation of Islam still shares some teachings followed by mainstream Islam. Whatever variance or transgression from the
teachings and practices of conventional Islam there may be, it still espouses some of the same teachings as mainstream Islam, i.e., the Five Pillars and Islamic morality (e.g., modesty, humility, no alcohol, no adultery, no drugs, and a clean life).

This thesis tries to be as fair, but careful and detailed, as possible in doing a comparative study to really help the readers gain a more profound understanding of the Nation of Islam and Islam. It must be understood that it is inevitable that comparative analysis on the Nation of Islam and Islam will reveal more differences than similarities. In fact, although this thesis does not offer a comparison between the Nation of Islam and Christianity, it is no surprise to learn that the Rev. Conrad Tillard, a Harvard Divinity School graduate and an ex-minister of the Nation of Islam who converted into Christianity, commented that the Nation of Islam shows similarities with the church in its culture and largely black congregation (“A ‘Prodigal Son’”).

This thesis presents reviews and compares what is believed, taught, and practiced by both the Muslim world and the Nation of Islam in order to provide the reader the information and understanding necessary to contemplate the following questions: Is the Nation of Islam Islam? Are its members Muslims? It is up to the readers to make their own conclusions about where the Nation of Islam stands as compared to Islam. As ideas regarding religion and faith are highly personal, it is likely that the answers to these questions will vary. By presenting comprehensive information on the Nation of Islam and Islam, it is hoped that this thesis will help clarify the issues surrounding the Nation of Islam’s place in larger Islam. Doubts about the Nation of Islam’s (Islamic) religious kinship to Islam remain, but one thing is certain. It will continue in its mission to fight for African Americans until freedom, justice, and equality are not only slogans but reality.
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCING THE NATION OF ISLAM

Background to the Study

The black and white relationship in America has always been discussed throughout the growth of this country: from the age of slavery to the segregated era, the civil rights movement, the post-segregated era, and up to this day. It is the issue of racism—together with the issues of discrimination, inequalities, and disadvantages—that leads to African Americans’ dissatisfactions over their socio-economic conditions in the white-dominated society.

Being oppressed and treated unfairly, African Americans organize themselves to struggle for equal access to economic opportunities, politics, law, education, and struggle for social improvements, either by cooperation with their own race (nationalist) or working together with white people (integrationist). As indicated in Bracey, Jr.’s (1972) *The Afro-Americans: Selected Documents*, the struggles to improve African Americans’ lives have been made through both forms of collaboration. Many African Americans try to use the nationalist approach in making progress of their race.

Concerning the former, we can conclude African Americans’ collaboration from, among others: Booker T. Washington’s (an accommodationist and founder of the National Negro Business League in 1900) speech at the Atlanta Cotton Exposition in 1895; Fred R. Moore’s (a spokesman of the National Negro Business League) speech urging Negro support for Negro business in 1904; W.E.B. Du Bois’ (an editor of an official magazine of NAACP and a nationalist who believed in Pan-Africanism but at the same time had a strong desire for integration) founding of the Niagara Movements in 1905; Marcus Garvey’s (a nationalist who preached racial pride and economic
nationalism, glorified African past, and viewed Africa as the future of black race) letter
addressing the nationalist program of UNIA; the motto of the National Association of
Colored Women (formed in 1896) “Lifting as We Climb” emphasizing self-help, racial
solidarity, and uplift for the advancement of the black race (Bracey, Jr., 1972, pp. 464-
500); and the call to end discrimination in trade unions and organized labors as voiced by

It was the original focus and relationship of the NOI with Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute that inspired the NOI to make the vocational training (in engineering, agriculture, and electrical skills) for men to raise the black race by making economic empowerment a response to racism. Booker T. Washington’s idea was followed by Elijah Muhammad, a product of Marcus Garvey’s UNIA. Louis Farrakhan then continued Elijah Muhammad to promote the theory of “hard work, self-sufficiency, and black capitalism” (White, Jr., 2001, pp. 62-63).

Both strategies (nationalist and integrationist/accommodationist), thus, were taken to improve the lives of African Americans in every aspect. One of the ways to unite African Americans in their efforts for racial improvement is by forming and joining a nationalist organization, one of which is the NOI. As C. Eric Lincoln (1994) affirms, African Americans have to face circumstances that require them to be black above all, so that they will be tempted to elevate their blackness by creating a self-image to run from the painful reality (p. 41). In fighting against the white racist society, African Americans try to obtain an equal position and establish existence through the NOI.

By understanding that agenda of African Americans’ lives improvement, I did a study on an African American organization in Toledo, Ohio, prior to commencing the
current analysis. The research focused on the NOI in Toledo, a religious as well as a
nationalist organization and a social movement. It best exemplifies how African
Americans teach themselves and their people about black pride and self-help by
combining religious teachings, black culture, and black nationalism. This is aimed at the
advancement of the black race socially and economically and the achievement of the
purpose of black national agenda by educating and empowering African Americans
(regardless of religion) with constructive thoughts about themselves. By doing so, it is
hoped that they will be motivated to find a way out of their race problems positively.

A Recent Case Study of the Nation of Islam in Toledo

Introduction

Many sources (e.g., books, articles, and websites) I read before doing a research
on the NOI in Toledo wrote about the NOI: its history, functions, teachings, beliefs, its
controversial leaders and their controversial statements. The NOI even has its own
official website ([www.noi.org](http://www.noi.org)) from which we can learn about this organization,
including its recent activities and statements. As a controversial organization, the NOI
has attracted many parties, religious and academic. They compare the NOI with Islam
and criticize it for being deviant from Islam and for holding a racist point of view
generated from hatred toward white people who oppressed them.

As the name “Nation of Islam” suggests, it may lead to two wrong perceptions. The first false perception is that people who have ever heard about the NOI’s teachings,
beliefs, or Louis Farrakhan’s controversial racial statements regarded as anti-white or
anti-Semitism (anti-Jews)—but know very little about Islam—may think that “that is
Islam”, that Islam is a religion of anti-whites and anti-Jews. Worse, they may then easily
associate Islam with terrorism in the United States because, as suggested by the very name, the NOI is considered by the public as anti-white and anti-Jews. People who are ignorant of Islam may think that way. This is a misunderstanding because Islam does not suggest the idea of racialism or hatred; to the contrary Islam believes in racial equality. The second false perception may be resulted from the name “Nation of Islam” is that people who know about Islam, but do not know anything about the NOI (for example Muslims from other countries who do not live in the United States, Muslims who just move into the United States, and Muslims who live in the United States for a very short time) except to a general knowledge that the NOI is an African American Islamic organization, may think that the NOI is the same as mainstream Islam and may ignorantly defend this assumption when an American says the NOI is not like mainstream Islam.

In most recent websites, it seemed that the NOI tried to get back to Islam as evident in the reconciliation of its leader, Louis Farrakhan, with Warith Deen Mohammed. But the news about the reconciliation, though shown in most recent websites and also in Mohamed Nimer’s (2000) book, was dated in 2000. By the time I started a research on the NOI in early 2005, it was still not quite clear whether the NOI still held the same old teachings as it did prior to the reconciliation or whether it did change and get back to Islam and hold truly Islamic beliefs and teachings.

Nevertheless, after the research is done, it becomes clear that one thing still does not change: the NOI keeps on maintaining Elijah Muhammad’s teachings. Up to this day, in every edition of the NOI’s official newspaper, the Final Call, the NOI’s old doctrines have always appeared in the section called “What Muslims Believe”. With regard to that
matter, this thesis is intended to explore the NOI’s doctrinal aspect and religious practices compared to those of the convention of Islam.

**Methodology**

It is important to unveil the status of the NOI today. However, it is difficult to find relevant sources in previous researches that clearly discuss the NOI’s status in terms of doctrinal affinity to (orthodox) Islam. Most publications about the NOI discuss its history, its position on racial issues in the United States, its struggle as an African American social movement, and its controversial leaders.

In conducting this research, observations and interviews were used as research methods. At first questionnaires were used but they did not work; nobody returned them. Before interviews, I went to the NOI in Toledo (Ohio) and Savannah (Georgia) to do observations and to establish contact with people from the NOI. After some visits, callings and emails, I finally conducted some interviews with the NOI’s members from Toledo, Detroit, and an ex-activist from Atlanta who by the time of interview was residing in Toledo, and one telephone interview with a NOI member in Alabama.

My first observation began in the event of Savior’s Day of the NOI in Toledo in AME Church on February 27, 2005 (see Appendix Photo 1). A week later, I came to the NOI’s Sunday prayer in Muhammad Mosque 91 on 1698 Nebraska Avenue, Toledo, Ohio. As unique to the NOI only, all of its mosques are named Muhammad Mosque followed by a number signifying location. Other than to Toledo, I also went to Muhammad Mosque in Savannah, Georgia (see Appendix Photo 2) in Spring Break, March 8, 2005 with my research advisor, Dr. Lillian Ashcraft-Eason (Associate Professor in History Department at Bowling Green State University, Ohio), and Dr. Djisovi Eason
(who then was an instructor in Africana Studies at Bowling Green State University) to meet the minister of the NOI in Savannah. Unlike the plan, I could only meet and talk to a woman working in the mosque’s bookstore, a poor black man who wanted to join the NOI, and some African Americans working in a nearby fast-food restaurant who told me about the lives of African Americans in general and how they felt about being ones.

Either in Savannah or Toledo, it was very difficult to meet the minister. Nevertheless, it was very useful to observe the NOI’s activities and the condition of life around the mosque’s neighborhood where the middle and lower classes of African Americans reside (see Appendix Photo 4).

The NOI’s mosque, either in Savannah or Toledo, does not look like a mosque. There is no empty space to perform daily five-time prayer and no bathroom with water taps for ablution as in ordinary mosques. Inside there is only a room with a lot of chairs for congregation to hear the minister’s preaching. While the mosque in Toledo looks like a small house, the one in Savannah looks like a book store. In fact, in its front part there is a book store selling stuff produced by the NOI (see Appendix Photo 3).

Finally, after some visits, observations and contacts, I could do interviews.

**Discussion**

The purposes of this research are to compare the NOI with Islam to find differences (and similarities), to observe how the NOI has served as a means of social movement in dealing with the problems of their race in the U.S., and to investigate its status today as to whether it may intend to get back to the teachings of Islam while at the same time still maintains the teachings of its founder and teacher (Wallace Fard and Elijah Muhammad) that are not in line with the accepted convention of Islam.
The NOI in Toledo, as an affiliation of the NOI, is like any other NOI’s affiliations within the U.S. with the same teachings of Elijah Muhammad and under the leadership of Louis Farrakhan today. By doing a research and direct observations on one of the NOI’s affiliations, a deeper insight of the organization can be gained. This is better than only reading books. Though the mission to interview Minister Charles Muhammad of the NOI in Toledo could not be accomplished since the minister did not come to Savior’s Day (celebration of the birth of the NOI’s founder, Wallace Fard), many interesting things about the NOI were found from observations in Toledo. This enabled me to connect the dots between this organization and its activities and mission to pursue the improvement of African Americans’ lives. The empowerment of the black community can be done by educating African Americans, utilizing and maximizing their potent capabilities to achieve equality between blacks and whites with their own power, and not being dependent on whites. It was also a good chance for me, prior to writing my thesis, to directly recognize the difference between the NOI and Islam by observing the NOI’s events. That way I could know what the NOI believes and teaches.

It can be concluded from all activities in Savior’s Day that black pride, self-help and unification of all African Americans, regardless of religion, are more embraced as means to unite African Americans in efforts to improve their lives economically and socially than religion (Islam) itself. Savior’s Day in Toledo included some activities such as book bazaar, theatrical operetta of the NOI’s youth theater, collecting donation, short lectures from some of its local activists, and watching live via satellite national celebration of Savior’s Day in Chicago supporting the second Million Man March.
(October 2005). Other than presenting Louis Farrakhan as the main speaker, the national celebration also presented salutations from some religious leaders invited by the NOI.

In his long speech entitled “He Came That We May Have Life”, Louis Farrakhan highlighted the positive contribution of the NOI’s founder to the black community and stressed the importance of inter-religion unity. He mentioned how the NOI’s founder (Wallace Fard, Elijah Muhammad’s teacher) had come to take African Americans from where they were to where they had been in the beginning (before being brought to America and enslaved), to save and give them life on the spiritual, mental, and moral levels (Final Call, 8 March 2005, p. 38). His speech also addressed how religions should not have been differentiated from one another and noted that there were not supposed to be denominations within religions and that all African Americans of various religions should cooperate in improving their lives. The unification of African Americans, regardless of religion, was addressed by the NOI more strongly than religion (Islam), as stated by Marsh (1996).

The Nation of Islam was not primarily a religious movement, but a social movement organization designed to alleviate socioeconomic problems of the African-American…By organizing in a collective movement, African-Americans want to change conditions which foster racial and class inequality (Marsh, 1996, p. 3).

It was no wonder that the stress on African American cooperation, regardless of religion, was reflected in the places of celebration of Saviors’ Day. Either national celebration in Chicago or local celebration in Toledo, it did not take place in a mosque but in a church. In Toledo it was held in AME Church, while in Chicago in Christ Universal Temple.
In connection with education, the NOI positively teaches its members to live in the words of God, to be submissive to God, to do good things and avoid bad things. Viewing the social phenomenon of drugs, gang violence, unemployment, and poverty among African Americans, the NOI in Toledo teaches its members to have a clean life, stay away from drugs, and get education as stressed in the message of the theatrical performance by SETT (Self Expression Teen Theater) consisting of the NOI’s member and non-member youth (see Appendix Photo 1). It also teaches its members to eat healthy food and have a healthy life to avoid diseases. In the economic sector the NOI in Toledo encourages its members to have businesses with other African Americans, as emphasized in the short speech of a successful NOI member owning a loan bank which offers house credit, not only because it is difficult for African Americans to get loan from a white men’s company but also because it will strengthen and improve their race economically.

The NOI in Toledo is similar to the NOI’s affiliations anywhere within the United States in terms of doctrinal beliefs. They believe in and practice the same teachings, the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, that often have been deemed by the media as holding racist belief. Maybe we cannot say that this organization is positively racist. There were some white people selling books in the NOI’s Bazaar in Toledo (at least they looked white and one of them had blonde hair). Some people who came to the celebration were not totally black, a few were mulattoes, and even the leader of the youth theater himself was a white man (at least he looked like a white man). Furthermore, from the big screen inside the church where we could watch the national celebration in Chicago, there appeared some female members in white uniform who did not have black skin; they were
light-skinned. One of the sisters who came to the front stage with a donation basket even looked like a Chinese. Some of its audiences also appeared to have non-black skin colors.

However, by calling themselves Black Muslims under a religion that does not recognize skin color and racial difference, and by holding teachings which are somewhat different from those taught in Islam, the NOI has made a universal religion (Islam) a narrow religion that seems to focus on one race only, the black race, and on its struggles for equality and justice and its alleviation in a society that has long oppressed them. The sufferings of African Americans present the worst example of a people’s dehumanization for hundreds of years under slavery and post-slavery racism. Even after being freed from that institution of bondage, they still had to live, and are living, in a poor condition as inferior people under discrimination and inequality. It is in such a condition that religion is possible to be used as a shield from the troubling worldly life, which is unfair to certain minority groups of people (especially blacks), as in the case of African Americans whose sufferings and dissatisfactions encourage them to join the NOI.

Observations on the NOI in Toledo and interviews with the NOI’s members make it clear that the NOI as an African American organization has focused itself on the struggles addressing African Americans’ issues. The conclusion that this group of people who call themselves Black Muslims serves as a social movement rather than mere a religious body is strengthened by information from literary sources and interviews. One of the literary sources, for example is Clifton Marsh’s (1996) *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Resurrection, Transformation, and Change of the Lost-Found Nation of Islam in America, 1930-1995*, reports that Warith Deen Mohammed thought Louis
Farrakhan was trying to stay side by side with black movement and Mohammed did not perceive the NOI as religious but political.

Regarding the interviews, I talked to three experts on African American history and religion. They were Assistant Minister Vincent Muhammad of Muhammad Mosque 91 in Toledo who in 2005 was also a Ph.D. student in Bowling Green State University, Dr. Devissi Muhammad—a NOI member in Detroit and an assistant professor in the Department of History at the University of Detroit Mercy—and the late Dr. Djisovi Eason of Africana Studies at Bowling Green State University. Interviews were conducted on March 22 (with Dr. Devissi Muhammad), March 25 (with Vincent Muhammad), and April 15, 2005 (with Dr. Djisovi Eason). By the time of interview, Vincent Muhammad and Dr. Devissi Muhammad had been the NOI’s members for 15 and 16 years, consecutively. Meanwhile, Dr. Djisovi Eason was an expert in African culture and religion and African American history who taught at Bowling Green State University until the end of his life in September 2005. He joined the activities of the NOI in Atlanta, Georgia, in the 1960s-1970s, but he never became a member.

Based on each interviewee’s background, the information on the NOI given was slightly different in focus. Dr. Devissi Muhammad, as a history professor and a knowledgeable long-time member of the NOI, discussed the NOI’s history, its internal conflicts, its beliefs and teachings, its relationship with and views on other Muslims and on the United States’ foreign policy concerning Muslims and Islamic countries post 9/11, and the history of African American as an oppressed people. Vincent Muhammad, as an assistant minister of the NOI in Toledo, explained about the NOI in Toledo and Islam as a religion. In addition, Dr. Djisovi Eason described the NOI in Atlanta in the 1960s-
1970s, the conflict between Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X, the civil rights movement of Martin Luther King Jr., and the human rights movement of Malcolm X. Each benefited the research in a different light.

Most information on the NOI in Toledo was gained from the explanation of Vincent Muhammad, assistant minister of Muhammad Mosque 91 in Toledo. By the time of interview he had been serving in Toledo for about five months after he moved from Cincinnati where he was a member in charge of the organization’s businesses.

The research study on the NOI in Toledo was conducted in three stages: first through an observational visit to Saviors’ Day in Toledo on February 27, 2005; second through an observational visit to Muhammad Mosque 91 in Toledo (functioned also as an administration building for the NOI’s official newspaper the Final Call) on Nebraska Avenue on March 2, 2005 during a Sunday prayer in which Assistant Minister Vincent Muhammad was one of the speakers; and finally through an interview with Vincent Muhammad on Friday, March 20, 2005.

After the NOI was founded in 1930, Vincent Muhammad recalled, the NOI’s mosques in hundreds of cities grew. In spite of that, in 1975 many people left and many NOI’s mosques were taken over by Wallace Muhammad. As a consequence, many mosques had to be restarted when Farrakhan rebuilt the NOI. Charles Muhammad began teaching in Toledo in 1986, a decade after Farrakhan rebuilt the NOI at the end of 1977.

The history of the NOI in Toledo started when Minister Charles Muhammad founded the NOI there in the 1980s. At first the NOI in Toledo did not have a mosque and many activities. For a couple of years Charles Muhammad had meetings in his house. As time went by, more people came and went. The mosque itself—now located on 1698
Nebraska Avenue—was not owned until 1991 when Charles Muhammad bought a building. Though this building has, since then, become a mosque, it is not necessarily an official one. It has also been functioned as the Final Call administration building. The NOI’s members in Toledo are now getting funds to build a proper mosque—which for the NOI is the headquarters. For their organization, a mosque functions as a medium, a place to come, a place of community activities and services, and a place to learn, rather than simply a place to pray. Unlike some NOI’s mosques in other states which are big and have rooms for thousands or hundreds of people—for instance the NOI’s mosques in Chicago, Texas, and Miami—the NOI’s mosque in Toledo is small. Despite its size, it is able to be a medium of community enrichment for the surrounding black neighborhood.

Other than owning a mosque, the NOI’s affiliations in some cities also have businesses. Some others have restaurants and schools in their cities as well. Unlike the NOI in some major cities in the United States, though, the NOI in Toledo does not have a school or restaurant. It is just a small affiliation with a few members (compared to the NOI in Chicago and Detroit, for example). Vincent Muhammad explained that it depended on its members whether they wanted to set up a business. There is a NOI member in Toledo named Edward Muhammad, a hair salon’s owner, who is on the board of the Toledo Urban Credit Union. Despite the fact of Muhammad’s membership in the credit union, the NOI has no relationship with it. In Savior’s Day, 27 February 2005, Edward Muhammad encouraged the NOI’s members and the black community in Toledo to be members of the Toledo Credit Union. This reflects the NOI’s view on its members as a unity of race rather than a unity of a religion’s believers. Hence, it is understood that
the NOI’s members in Toledo do not see their organization merely as a group of believers coming to the mosque, but as the black community as a whole.

Regarding security, compared to ordinary Muslim’s mosques (masjid) which always open, the NOI’s mosque is much more closed and tightly secured. When I went to the NOI’s mosque in Toledo, it was closed and there seemed to be nobody inside until when I knocked the door and somebody opened it. Vincent Muhammad clarified that was because the NOI is not in a Muslim society but in America where at times situations can be very violent; people have guns and carry weapons.

The violence history in the past NOI has taught it to be more careful in terms of security today. The NOI does a search procedure to make sure nobody comes in with guns. There have been instances of people coming to church and starting to shoot. The NOI worries about the possibility that somebody will attack the mosque, either for political or other reasons. Vincent Muhammad later added that if the NOI in Toledo had a bigger mosque, the door would be locked and it would not allow anybody to come in and out without being searched. Even though the NOI is peaceful today, it still makes sure that the search procedure is done in all its meetings. That is unique to the NOI, as has been commonly supposed to be the case with ordinary mosques or other Muslim groups who do not do a search procedure.

With the mosque as its center of activities, the NOI in Toledo occasionally invites the community around the mosque. One week before I visited the mosque on Sunday, it had around sixty people in the mosque where it had its youth group and gave awards. Some parents and people in the community came out and supported the event. Then, on every Saturday, the sisters of the mosque fry fish and sell it out around the community to
raise money. Also, there is the NOI’s youth program that goes on everyday. Some of the believers who work for the youth program go to schools everyday and talk to young people. They go to housing projects to talk to people and invite them to the mosque and try to be a good example to the youth. The NOI in Toledo has different events throughout the year with Savior’s Day as the largest event during which many activities are held throughout the weekend. In addition, every October 16 it celebrates the Day of Atonement which is the anniversary of the Million Man March 1995.

The activities of the NOI in Toledo are more or less the same as in the NOI anywhere in the United States. Like in most cities, it distributes the Final Call door to door, on the street corners, and in different business places across the city every Saturday. It gives views on what is going on with African Americans and people of color worldwide, and it is engaged in community outreach with the youth. As mentioned earlier, it has a youth program, called Self Expression Teen Theatre, where children learn about ills and drugs, do skits on social themes, go on tours, and visit schools and churches. The NOI in Toledo recruits children to be peer educated and teaches them important subjects affecting youth, such as drugs, crime, and teenage pregnancy. It takes them to a training process to learn about black history. What interesting is that those children do not have to be the NOI’s members or Muslims. In fact, many are Christians.

For its activities, the NOI in Toledo gets fund through charity. Its believers give charity on the weekly or monthly bases. Inside the mosque it has items to purchase, such as Louis Farrakhan’s latest tapes (CD, video, and cassettes), Elijah Muhammad’s books, small pieces, oils, incense, and candles. Different cities have different things. Toledo has no big business, but it is planning to have businesses within two years. Now it is building
a mosque or a house can be used by the youth program to seat in up to four hundreds people. In addition, it plans to have a restaurant, a bookstore, and a room for community events. For those purposes, it has been looking for funding through the events it holds.

Though many NOI members are not rich, they do not distinguish themselves in classes. Vincent Muhammad asserted that the majority of people in the NOI, just like the majority of African Americans, are living in poverty. Many people who came to the NOI when it was started were very poor African Americans in the 1930s (the Great Depression). As things grew, more African Americans became the middle and upper classes. The NOI has every socio-economic group. Members of various socio-economic groups all work to build the organization and improve the lives of African Americans by giving charity and collecting money every weekend. That is why in Toledo there is a building fund for people to donate.

As an organization which is changing from time to time and has had fractions inside, the NOI in Toledo (as a part of the NOI) experiences the same thing. Nevertheless, from Vincent Muhammad’s information, the NOI in Toledo has no conflict with ex-members who have different views and sign out from their memberships. Vincent Muhammad mentioned that there were fractions of people who believed in Elijah Muhammad’s teachings but did not follow Louis Farrakhan. When Elijah Muhammad left the NOI in 1975, there were fractions. People went on starting their own things and Farrakhan started it back in 1978. People like John Muhammad (Elijah Muhammad’s brother) and Warith D. Mohammed (Elijah Muhammad’s son) have their own groups. Some people in Toledo follow them, but the NOI in Toledo has no conflict with them.
With reference to membership, Vincent Muhammad could not tell the exact number of members in Toledo because people leave and join the NOI everyday such that the number always changes. Only a few people come to Sunday prayer, but in certain celebrations, like Savior’s Day a lot of people come. As a consequence, it is difficult to count the accurate number. Whether an assistant minister like Vincent Muhammad really knows or not is questionable, as Kelleter (2000) once suggests that those who know will not tell the number of membership, while those who do not know will tell.

Despite the difference in size of the organization’s affiliations within the country, the NOI as an organization, Vincent Muhammad informed, is a hierarchical organization with a military-like chain of command. That chain of authority is strict in discipline, as we can learn from general orders in the official document for the NOI’s officers written in Adam Parfrey’s (2001) *Extreme Islam*. In one of the essays in part six (“The Radical Outsiders”) of the book, entitled “Nation of Islam Question and Answer” (Parfrey, 2001, pp. 231-237), the structure of the NOI’s orders is explained as below.

General orders:

1. To take charge of this post, and all Temple property in view.
2. To walk my post in a perfect manner, keeping always on the alert.
3. To report all violations of orders that I am instructed to enforce.
4. To report all calls from posts more distant from the Temple than my own.
5. To quit my post only when properly relieved.
6. To receive, obey, and pass on to the Sentinel who relieves me, all orders from the Commanding Officer, Officer of the Day, and Non-Commissioned Officers of the Guard only.

7. To talk only in the line of duty.

8. In case of disorder, give the alarm.

9. To allow no one to commit a nuisance on or near my post.

10. In any cases not covered by instructions, call the Guards.

11. To salute all Officers, and Standards not cased.

12. To be especially watchful at nights during the time of meetings (Parfrey, 2001, p. 231).

Vincent Muhammad later made it clear that the head of the organization as a whole is Louis Farrakhan. Farrakhan makes decisions in the NOI and appoints ministers in each area, though this is not necessarily the case. Some ministers are appointed by other ministers. Each mosque is led by a minister who makes the final decision in the local NOI. The minister is assisted by one to three assistant ministers, depending on the size of the city and the mosque. If the minister, for some reasons, goes away or something happens to him, his position will be replaced by assistant minister. Under him, there are a sister captain and a brother captain in charge of training the congregation. Sister Captain trains the NOI’s sisters. Those sisters usually use white uniform—uniform number 19 though they also have uniform of different colors—which is the standard uniform used in Sunday prayer or in a different official event. Like the sisters, the brothers are trained by Brother Captain. Both Brother Captain and Sister Captain have lieutenants that do certain tasks to help them. For financial records, there is a secretary of
the mosque who keeps track of the economy of the mosque, the money, the charity, and makes sure of the accuracy. Then, there is a chief of protocol whose duty is like an ambassador. He is the one who goes out to the community and lets people know about different things going on in the NOI and goes to events and makes sure that people are aware of things going on in the city.

In connection with deliverance of religious teachings to its members, Vincent Muhammad pointed out that in teaching Islam to people who barely knew about Islam, Elijah Muhammad introduced the religion to African Americans gradually. Ramadan’s fast, for example, was first taught not in the month of Ramadan, like other Muslims, but in December. When Elijah Muhammad introduced Islam to the black community, he knew he could not do it in traditional way because African Americans had no idea of Islam, the Qur’an, and the proper way to pray. Consequently, Vincent Muhammad explained, Elijah Muhammad taught Islam gradually and started Ramadan in December as mercy to people who joined the NOI since they were not used to fasting. Because December has the shortest day, from sunset to sundown, it was thought to be easier. Henceforward, they began to have Ramadan with the rest of the Muslim world. Other than that, though, the NOI and Islam are different in the concept of God, messenger / rasul, charity / zakat, shalat (Friday prayer is included), mosque’s function, and the point of view on race issues.

In preaching the teachings of Elijah Muhammad in Sunday prayer at the NOI’s mosque in Toledo, other than using the Qur’an as supporter, Assistant Minister Vincent Muhammad mainly uses a book written by Fard Muhammad, the NOI’s founder. Vincent Muhammad elucidated that in that book there were different lessons and problems to
solve—problems with a deep meaning that went into the societal ills of the black community. The book has what the NOI calls “the actual facts in student enrollment” (Vincent Muhammad, personal interview) which include the recitation of original man. The NOI believes that the original man is “the Asiatic black man, the maker, the owner, the creamer of the planet earth, the God of the universe”. That belief was declared several times by the NOI’s teenage members in their half-military salutations before and after their theatrical show as the opening of Savior’s Day 2005 in Toledo.

The NOI’s original man theory is a part of the NOI’s efforts to teach black superiority as a counter attack against white superiority which oppresses African Americans. Besides that, it teaches that interracial marriage was not suggested in the NOI, as Elijah Muhammad taught. In reality today, some members marry white people. Nonetheless, the organization has non-black members. In Toledo, for instance, there are members that are off color—not black—but there is no white member. A NOI member in Toledo married a white woman who later converted into (the NOI’s) Islam before joining the organization and that was accepted. Vincent Muhammad clarified that today the NOI does not outlaw interracial marriage but believes that the best thing is to marry inside one’s own people (black with black, Asian with Asian, Hispanic with Hispanic, etc.) and religion (if possible).

In addressing the question of how to teach children to live in America while maintaining Islamic teachings, as the NOI’s member and believer, Vincent Muhammad looks upon the teachings of Elijah Muhammad of raising children in an Islamic way as taught today by Louis Farrakhan. However, he realized that there was always a possibility that children would go against parents’ teachings and have their own ways.
In relation to the question of identity, many members share the same last name, Muhammad—which is taken from the Prophet Muhammad, not Fard Muhammad. Their mosques also have the same name, Muhammad Mosque, only with different numbers. Vincent Muhammad explained that the name Muhammad was adopted because the NOI’s members are families. Louis Farrakhan gives everyone the last name Muhammad, meaning someone worth of praise—what the NOI is striving for. The NOI takes the name to move up to what the name means.

**The Nation of Islam as an Alternative for Christianity and the Question of White Jesus**

The NOI was born out of the need of African Americans to empower themselves in order to combat racism and oppression. Islam is used by the NOI as a means of rebuilding the lives of African Americans when many of them feel that Christianity, the major religion in the United States, gives no solution to their problems because that religion served to maintain the supremacy of white people. When explaining Louis Farrakhan’s departure from Christianity, A. Marshall (1996) writes:

> His early Christian upbringing caused him to believe the church was impotent to help black people achieve liberation. He had no problem with Jesus, only the church’s inaction concerning black people’s oppression. He felt it was irrelevant to black’s critical needs…Even as a youth he saw the weakness of a faith that was preoccupied with heavenly reward when black people needed immediate vindication (Marshall, 1996, p. 15).

Outraged by the sufferings of their people, African American leaders such as Malcolm X and Louis Farrakhan, even before becoming leaders, began to feel that
Christianity did not help African Americans. They began to question the whiteness of Jesus across American churches when they learnt the history of African people as the first people on earth and the origins of old civilizations, cultures, and religions. Malcolm X, for instance, objected the fact that the church did not take a strong enough abolitionist stance during slavery, and was even used to help maintain slavery by perpetuating the notion that it was a holy duty for the enslaved people to obey their masters. He also took issue with the church’s indecisive position on racial discrimination. Quoting Malcolm X, Marshall (1996) writes, “Malcolm denounced the perversion of Christianity rather than renounce the faith outright. He had little patience for a Jesus ‘who does not even look like us!’” (Marshall, 1996, pp. 34-35). While in prison Malcolm X already posed the idea that Jesus was colored, and not white, which angered the white minister who preached in the prison. Marshall (1996) states that even a minister like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was disappointed by the hypocrisy of the white church that taught humanity and love but let its members segregated by race and positioned as superior and inferior (p.35). Just like Malcolm X, Louis Farrakhan raises the same question we can still hear in his speeches today—a question which is still in debate—of whether Jesus is a white man with blue eyes and long blond hair as has been depicted by (white) Christianity so far.

**Religious Identity versus Social Movement**

Islam was already the religion of some African people before they were captured in their homeland, shipped to, and enslaved in the Americas (Gomez, 1998, pp. 59-87). Therefore, it is understandable that Islam as an African religion is seen by the NOI as the “natural religion” of the people who had been stripped of their identity (name, language, culture, history, and religion). Islam in the NOI, as taught by Elijah Muhammad, thus
becomes a means of reclaiming that (Marshall, 1996, pp. 31-35). However, the
reinterpretation of Islam in such a way that religion becomes less a focus of its teaching
than as a means of social activism makes the NOI a social movement, rather than a
religious organization, with Islam as its religious identity.

Accordingly, Islam in the NOI (Elijah Muhammad’s version of Islam) must be
understood not mainly as a religion but as an instrument of a social movement. This
rationalizes the radical thinking of the NOI with respect to racial issues and race relations
in the United States. Though in the process Islam’s teachings have been radically
modified and transformed by the NOI to fit its own needs, as a political means Islam is
chosen for a reason. When Christianity as “the religion of the white men who oppressed
and enslaved blacks” (Kelleter, 2000, p. 9) is considered ineffective for African
Americans’ social, cultural, economic, and politic struggles, the NOI does not only refuse
integration but also detaches its members from Christianity. As an alternative it embraces
Islam—a new and modified Islam developed in the United States by the NOI—as what
has been considered as non-white to give them a non-white identity, “a sense of purpose
and destiny” (ibid., p. 9), elucidation for their predicaments, racial pride, future hope of
black superiority, and an actual improvement program for African Americans which
stresses working hard self-reliantly together with their fellow African Americans
(Lincoln, 1994, pp. 63-93). In view of that, Islam provides the NOI with a means for
social movement rather than a religious identity.

In The Lost-Found Nation of Islam in Americas, Clifton Marsh (1996) describes
the NOI as a nationalist organization and a social movement. He affirms that the NOI fits
the definition of social movement, that is, “a large, organized group of people committed
to collective goals and ideals to preserve or change the existing political-economic structure and human relations in a society” (Marsh, 1996, p. 1). It is the NOI as a nationalist and social movement, rather than as an Islamic organization, that attracts African Americans of mostly lower class to join it. People join the NOI for reasons other than religious conversion (to Islam). Those reasons are basically the NOI’s appeal as a social movement that offers things African Americans are looking for. It is not Islam as a religion that appeals new members. If that were the case, they could just go to a mosque and take part in its religious activities or join Islamic organizations with more emphasis on programs fostering Islamic teachings. C. Eric Lincoln (1994) addresses this point.

Lincoln (1994) suggests seven reasons that attract African Americans to join the NOI. First is the strong sense of group solidarity, self consciousness, and black consciousness. In that kind of solidarity there is an opportunity to be identified with a power to surmount white domination and there is an acknowledgement of individuals as African Americans who work together to realize the group’s objectives. Here religion is not the appeal but the underlying support. Lincoln writes, “…although the Black Muslims call their movement religion, religious values have a secondary importance. They are not part of the movement’s basic appeal, except to the extent that they foster and strengthen the sense of group solidarity” (p. 26). As a consequence, racial identity may replace religious identity, as stated in Dr. Buell Gallagher’s (1946) warning to orthodox Islam in his book Color and conscience: the irrepressible conflict.

There are signs that the Pan-Islamic movement may harden into a new political nationalism, based on race, which may replace the Islam of an international and interracial brotherhood. This Pan-Islamic spirit which
appears about to come to full fruition in a union of the entire Muslim world against the rest of the globe is one of tomorrow’s imponderables (Gallagher, 1946, p. 191, cited in Lincoln, 1994, p. 26).

In the same tone Lincoln supports Gallagher’s statement of Pan-Islamism—“a religious movement calling for the Muslims of the world to unite” (“Pan Islamism”)—of African Americans’ out of what he calls “anti-white sentiment” (Lincoln, 1994, p.27).

Second is the anti-Christian tone. Although the membership is predominantly ex-Christians—except those under twenty who had no strong faith in Christianity before or want to rebel against the authority of their parents as symbolized by the church—they are mostly people dissatisfied with the church or Christianity. An example will be a minister in Richmond, Virginia, who led his congregation out of the church to join the NOI (and he later became a NOI minister) because of his disappointment with his denomination’s stance on racial issues (Lincoln, 1994, p. 27). It is obvious in that case that the reason for joining the NOI has nothing to do with Islam at all. Lincoln (1994) asserts that if Christianity is viewed as the white man’s religion, the denial of Christianity is seen as going against the white man. Moreover, joining an organization such as the NOI and rejecting the values of the majority increases a black person’s sense of self-esteem (p. 27). Other than that, the membership is also won due to the NOI’s sympathy and willingness to accept and rehabilitate people at the lowest rung of the social ladder (e.g. ex-convicts, prostitutes, and drug addicts) whom church is reluctant to accept unless they have been cleaned (p. 28).

Third is the movement’s stress on the outward manifestation of fraternal responsibility. Lincoln (1994) analyzes that many African Americans who feel social and
civil insecurity want to find security, consolation, friendship and to escape from isolation and helplessness (p. 28) by joining the NOI.

Fourth is extreme solidarity (willingness to die for other members, or sisters and brothers, as they are called). This attracts those in search for security and a cause (a focus of enmity resulted from racial oppression). The feeling of brotherhood and unity is reflected in the fact that to address an NOI’s member as “Brother” or “Sister” is, according to Lincoln (1994), “the highest compliment . . . something beyond ordinary religious courtesy” (p. 29).

Fifth is the emphasis on youth and masculinity. This is illustrated by the young and charming ministers as well as the polite, highly dignified and clean cut men who seem capable and confident to confront the challenges of the present and the future. This represents a significant appeal of the NOI.

The aforementioned appeal of masculinity has something to do with the sixth reason: redefinition of the roles of men and women in the NOI. Though men and women are treated equally, each carries his/her own traditional roles. There is a great stress on the man’s responsibility as the head of the family while at the same time women occupy a place of dignity and respect, which in turn has a positive effect on children.

Lastly, the seventh emphasis is the NOI’s school, the University of Islam (consisting of elementary and high schools), with its strong emphasis on the knowledge of the NOI, African Americans, black history, African civilization, and on the discipline instilled in students when they are taught to behave in accordance with the tenets of the NOI (Lincoln, 1994, pp. 30-31).
There are enough reasons to consider the NOI as a social movement rather than a religious (Islamic) organization. First, the reasons for which African Americans are attracted to join the NOI, as suggested by Lincoln above, have nothing to do with a desire to become a part of Islam. Next are the NOI’s efforts toward improving socio-economic conditions (as we shall see in the next chapters) in the black community. The other is the content of speeches of the NOI’s leaders about black and white race-themes and how to improve African Americans’ lives socially and economically based on the teachings of Elijah Muhammad. There is almost no mention in these speeches of the religion of Islam and the Islamic way of life as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad.

Separatist Ideology

The NOI is a black nationalist organization with a separatist ideology, the goal of which is to set up a nation within a nation and to separate African American people from the rest of Americans in a separate territory within the United States. As explained by Robert A. Rockaway (1995) in “The Jews Cannot Defeat Me”: The Anti-Jewish Campaign of Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam, black nationalist organization has two patterns: one is external emigration—African Americans go back to Africa—and the other is internal separatism—African Americans create settlements in the U.S. Marcus Garvey’s “Back-to-Africa” program is the most famous program of the external emigration pattern, while the NOI’s separatism is an example of the second pattern. With Marcus Garvey’s deportation to his country of origin, Jamaica, following the commutation of his sentence in 1927 after being convicted two years earlier for a controversial charge of fraud via mail (Rockaway, 1995, p. 9), African Americans lost
their great leader who committed to blacks’ racial pride until Elijah Muhammad established the NOI whose foundation was laid by Wallace D. Fard.

According to Clifton Marsh (1996), there are various types of social movements and among which separatism is one. The NOI which, as previously stated, ascribes to the notion of internal or territorial separatism, aims to become a nation within a nation and is asking for its own territory within the U.S. (Marsh, 1996, pp. 7-11). Marsh goes on to say the following regarding organizations that advocate internal or territorial separatism:

Organizations of this persuasion feel oppressed in the United States, but have no strong inclination to immigrate to Africa. The nation-within-a-nation concept depends upon the economic and military support as well as goodwill of the parent nation (United States). Territorial separatists assume the parent nation and the black states could coexist peacefully without exploitation by the dominant power (Marsh, 1996, p. 11).

The NOI’s position on separatism is voiced in the Final Call, an NOI’s publication, which states that the NOI believes that “the offer of integration is hypocritical and is made by those who are trying to deceive black peoples into believing that their 400-year-old open enemies of freedom, justice and equality are, all of a sudden, their friends,” and “that such deception is intended to prevent black people from realizing that the time in history has arrived for the separation from the whites of this nation” (Final Call, 8 March 2005, p. 39). Other than separate territory, the NOI as its program also wants freedom, justice, equal opportunity (equal membership in society), equal employment opportunity, equal education, prohibition of intermarriage or race mixing, immediate end to police brutality and mob attacks against African Americans throughout
the U.S., freedom for all black men and women under death sentence in prisons, and the exemption of its people from all taxation by the U.S. government so long as they are deprived of equal justice under the laws (ibid., p. 39).

The Foundation of the Nation of Islam

The NOI was founded by Wallace D. Fard (a.k.a. Wallace Fard Muhammad/W.D. Fard/Wali Farad) in Detroit in 1930. Claiming to be born in Mecca (though some sources mention other places), this man with fair complexion had an unclear identity as far as his origins and real name. His mysterious disappearance from the United States in 1934 was surrounded by speculation ranging from him having been to heaven, being sent to jail, to moving to Mexico as described in his postcards to Elijah Muhammad.

In his book *Louis Farrakhan: Made in America*, A. Marshall (1996) describes how Wallace Fard found his early followers among the poor African Americans in Paradise Valley, a black neighborhood in Detroit, by disguising himself as a peddler and a salesman and attracting followers in the neighborhood with his stories of glorious Africa and African heritage. He then established the Temple of Islam and started to extend his Afro-centric ideas to include what he called the natural religion of African people by introducing Islam through a means that the people were already accustomed to: the Bible. Many of his religious teachings were influenced by the Moorish Temple Society although he never joined Noble Drew Ali’s movement. Not only did he teach “his” religious doctrines, but he also attacked white people through his lectures which he delivered to downtrodden African Americans who had been disillusioned after coming from the South to the North only to suffer discrimination and economic hardship during the Great Depression (Marshall, 1996, pp. 6-9).
The Teachings of the Nation of Islam

Wallace Fard’s controversial sermons included the declarations that he is the manifestation of Allah, who is God, and that Elijah Muhammad is Allah’s messenger (Lee, 1996, pp. 27-28), the white man is the devil by nature, the existence of white people is the result of the machinations of an evil scientist named Yacub who six thousands years ago sought to create the “biological mutated Caucasians” who have no soul by manipulating a black recessive gene (Lincoln, 1994, p. 77), and African Americans are the Asiatic black people who are “the Original Man…, the Owner, the cream of the planet earth, God of the Universe” (Alexander, 1998, p. 60).

However, the doctrine was not accepted unconditionally by all members. Those who disagreed, such as, for example, the intellectual Vibert L. White, Jr., felt that the ignorance of most members would make them accept and recite it without any protest over the content (White, Jr., 2001, p. 63). Vibert L. White, Jr. (2001), who earned his Master’s degree in History from Purdue University, wrote in Inside the Nation of Islam that he challenged many lessons called “Supreme Wisdom and Knowledge” consisting of Wallace Fard’s lessons to Elijah Muhammad that must be recited by the NOI’s members. He told the “ignorant” brothers that the materials were not up-to-date and they contained incorrect information such as figure for the population of African Americans, as part of the earth’s population, which was inconsistent with the data from the U.S. census. He considered those lessons as “elementary courses in math, reading, and writing—with a smattering of history, geography, and religion” (White, Jr., 2001, pp. 61-63).

Even so, the deity of the mysterious Wallace Fard whose origin was unclear has been strongly adopted by the NOI. There is a large annual celebration called Savior’s
Day to commemorate his birthday. He is considered to be a *mahdi* whose position, according to Dr. Devissi Muhammad, is higher than any of the prophets including the Prophet Muhammad and Jesus (Devissi Muhammad, personal interview). In its official newspaper, the *Final Call*, it is said that the NOI and its members “believe that Allah (God) appeared in the person of Master W. Fard Muhammad, July 1930, the long awaited ‘Messiah’ of the Christians and ‘Mahdi’ of the Muslims” (“What the Muslims” 39).

In teaching Islam as a “natural religion” of African Americans, Wallace Fard used the Bible to teach his doctrine, not to support Christianity but to prepare his followers who knew nothing about Islam for studying the Qur’an (Marshall, 1996, p. 9). Among his converts was the would-be “messenger” Elijah Poole, who then changed his last name into Muhammad. Poole joined the NOI in Detroit (where the first NOI’s temple was established) in the organization’s early emergence in 1930. Soon he moved fast as a lieutenant, then as the first Minister of Islam. He was trusted to organize Temple II in Chicago in 1932. It was Elijah Muhammad who stated in his sermons that Wallace Fard was God. Wallace Fard was finally removed from leadership after he was put in jail and ordered to leave Detroit by May 26, 1933, before his mysterious disappearance in 1934 after being released from prison in Chicago (Marshall, 1996, pp.10-11).

In addition to teaching that Wallace Fard was God, Elijah Muhammad also taught a system of beliefs relating to the idea that the Caucasian (white) was the devil because he was allowed by God to rule the world and the original people, the black people, who would finally inherit the earth (Marshall, 1996, p. 11, El-Amin, 1990, p. 5) and because, in Dr. Devissi Muhammad’s opinion, he uses “power, force, and authority destructively in an evil way” (Devissi Muhammad, personal interview). Dr. Devissi Muhammad
continued to criticize as evil the practices whites in the present time, citing the U.S. actions in Iraq as an example of the whites’ abuse of power. He also raised the issues of U.S. industries exploiting cheap labor abroad to produce products sold at a profit back in the U.S. while at the same time creating reserved workers inside the country as more industries are operated overseas, and the U.S. economic structure which, as a Capitalist system, exploits the working masses in order to sustain a small elite rich class.

With regard to human creation, Elijah Muhammad taught that the black race came into being 66 trillion years ago from the tribe of Shabazz while the white race was created through genetic manipulation and was inferior to the black race (Marshall, 1996, p. 11). In addition, the NOI taught that at the beginning of time there were some Gods; it was Yacub, a black God who was also a scientist, who created the white man 6000 years ago (El-Amin, 1990, p. 5).

Black Theology, Black Power, and the Concept of God in the Nation of Islam

There are two underlying theories which are necessary in order to understand the NOI’s conception of God. One is the concept of God in the theory of Black Theology and the other is the concept of black people as the chosen people in the theory of millenarianism. The following is a discussion of both theories which are integral to the understanding of the NOI’s concept of God.

Black Theology, established in the late 1960s, can not be discussed without addressing the notion of Black Power which also emerged in the 1960s. Black Theology, as defined in the “Black Theology” Statement by the National Conference of Black Churchman in Milton Sernett’s (1972) African American Religious History, is basically a theology of black liberation (p. 564). In James Cone’s term, it was initially “the
theological arm of Black Power” (p. 570). Two months after the publication of Cone’s *Black Theology and Black Power* and James Forman’s “Black Manifesto” insisting reparation from the white church, the National Committee of Negro Churchman made statements on Black Power and Black Theology in 1969 (Sernett, 1972, pp. 555-566).

Having sounded by liberal black leaders such as Dr. Benjamin Payton, of the Commission on Religion and Race of the National Council of Churches in the 1960s (ibid., p. 555), and Stokely Carmichael, a Civil Rights activist of SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) who cried for Black Power on the James Meredith March in June 1966 (Wilmore, 1998, pp. 210-211), Black Power called African Americans to utilize their power to be able to obtain equality and justice. Black Power’s advocates believed that Black Power was not unchristian—in fact, James Cone, as quoted by Wilmore (1998), deemed that Black Power was necessary for “a Christian understanding of freedom and authentic humanity” (p. 247)—and was not in opposition to the principle of love in Christianity as was accused by the whites who not only distorted the slogan Black Power but also corrupted the power all for themselves and left African Americans oppressed and powerless (Sernett, 1972, pp. 555-561).

In reality, when racism in America has been something cultural and structuralized, and while many African Americans continue to live powerless under racism, there is no such thing as Black Power. A few successful African Americans cannot hide the shadow of many other African Americans who remain powerless in this country. It is in the view of African Americans’ experience of powerlessness and oppression that Black Theology has asserted it not as a religion defined by the white
Christianity but by the experience of African Americans that calls for the liberation of black people in America (Sernett, 1972, pp. 555-579).

The term Black Theology emerged recently in the late 1960s but the motivations and underlying ideas originated during the times of slavery (Marshall, 1996, p. 16). It has three basic elements: first, God is identified with the oppressed and works to free them; second, God is “existentially (though not necessarily racially) black” (p. 16) because of his identification with the oppressed (blacks) and is embodied in Jesus; and third, church must be identified with the oppressed as Jesus is identified with the oppressed. Therefore, in what later would become the justification of the NOI, Black Theology believes that if Christianity is passive in helping blacks (the oppressed), it is worthless (pp. 16-17). Quoting other scholars’ arguments, Marshall (1996) writes:

God, in Black Theology, is the divine creator of the universe, who identifies with the oppressed and downtrodden, and works through human history to liberate them from their oppressors. James Cones writes, “If God is not involved in human history, then all theology is useless, and Christianity…is…a hollow, meaningless diversion.” The God of Black Theology is not a deity who supports, condones, and remains neutral about oppression. Scholars argue that if blackness equals oppression, and those blacks who suffer reflect image of God, who identifies with them—then Black Theology’s God is existentially, though not racially black. Cone asserts, “The blackness of God means that God has made the oppressed condition his own. This identification of God with us is personified in the Jesus Christ of the Black Theology – the suffering servant.” Josiah Young
writes, “Thus for blacks, Jesus is no abstract Trinitarian person, but a fellow sufferer.” James Cone goes a step further by stating that Jesus “a living reality in the lives of black people, able to lift them out of the slave condition and grant them freedom” (Marshall, 1996, p. 16).

Thus, by seeing blacks as an oppressed people fulfilling the manifestation of God, the NOI justifies its claim that black is God in an apparently simple but complicated concept of God as explained by Dr. Devissi Muhammad in his interview.

We argue that black people are the fulfillment or in the fulfillment of prophecy. That is our argument. We argue various points in the Bible. So, that’s why, that’s another reason. Various points in the Qur’an, we argue, (shows) that African-American people fulfill that. For example, we argue that in Genesis, in the first book of the Bible, it says that after 400 years of God’s people being strangers in a land, for 400 years they would be oppressed and they would serve a particular nation, God would come. We say black people in the Nation of Islam…we say black people fulfill that. We say that after 400 years, God came in the person of a man. And we say that because of the superior knowledge and wisdom and power and authority that was in the person, not just as man’s physical but his mind, the quality of knowledge. We say that was superior to whatever was going on in that time (Devissi Muhammad, personal interview).

**The Nation of Islam as a Millenarian Movement**

The NOI’s doctrine that black (here black refers to black people as one race) is the God of the universe is in line with the idea of a chosen people, as suggested in the
theory of millenarianism explained in Martha F. Lee’s (1996) *The Nation of Islam: An American Millenarian Movement*. Lee explains that this theory combines religion with politics and provides an analysis of how and why people foresee the impeccability of their lives. She also informs that millenarianism as the core of the NOI’s original doctrine is a “belief in an imminent, ultimate, collective, this-worldly, and total salvation” that proposes the idea of the rising of the Black millennium following the fall of “the White World and its oppressive political institutions” (Lee, 1996, p. 3). According to Yonina Talmon as quoted by Lee, the myth as a chosen people is a way to alleviate black people of their pain as a people who is not only oppressed but also impoverished, unable to climb onto a higher social status, has no political power, and suffers from the feeling of deprivation and resentment (ibid., pp. 4-5). Millenarianism not only justifies the belief of Messianism (Elijah Muhammad as God’s messenger) but also gives the idea of “community isolation” (ibid., p. 6) that underlies the NOI’s doctrine of black separatism.

As a people that suffers oppression and poverty, African Americans embrace the vision of millenarianism that promises a perfect future (Lee, 1996, p. 4). In order to prepare for that future, the NOI established its unique education system (building its own schools), encourages businesses, formed a military corps (the Fruit of Islam or FOI), and works to strengthen the black family unit (ibid., p. 2). Hence, the NOI is not only a social movement but also a millenarian movement striving to create a separate identity. What Elijah Muhammad taught about self-respect, as is stressed many times today by the NOI’s leader Louis Farrakhan, harks back to the millenarianism concepts proposed by Yonina Talmon, specifically that “millenarianism may emerge from the search for “a
coherent value system,’ a new cultural identity, and ‘a regained sense of dignity and self-respect’ (Lee, 1996, p. 5).

**The Fruit of Islam (FOI)**

Marshall (1996) writes that the NOI with its paramilitary corps, the Fruit of Islam (FOI), is probably the only religious organization in the United States which has a body of discipline and enforcement that can judge (without any appeal over its decision) and punish its members and also give them protection like a police force. The FOI administers the trials of members who commit deviant acts or offenses ranging from absence from meetings, sleeping in a meeting, failure to bring visitors (they call them the “Lost-Founds”) to meetings, allowing people under the influence of alcohol and people who state unwillingness to die for God to enter a temple, selling or eating pork, drug abuse, misuse of the organization’s money, revealing the NOI’s activities to outsiders, failure to pay levy for being overweight, using inappropriate language before female Muslims, and adultery. There are at least three sentences; punishment ranges from class C (performing labor at the temple or any other required places), class F (excommunication up to 5 years), and the most severe is permanent expulsion (Marshall, 1996, pp. 45-47). The FOI, however, is not merely a military wing as many people assume. Other than enforcing discipline, it also assures the implementation of male responsibilities in a patriarchal family, as noted by Malcolm X who wrote, “The FOI spends a lot more time in lectures on learning to be men…the responsibilities of a husband and father…the importance of father-male image in the household” (Haley, 1992, p.247, qtd. in Marshall, 1996, p. 45). C. Eric Lincoln (1994) explains that the FOI symbolizes the NOI movement because it can be interpreted as how the NOI views
blacks as the fruit of slavery who contain in themselves “the seed of a coming Black Nation” (p. 204), the new nation of African Americans (Marshall, 1996, p. 45).

The FOI was originally founded by W. D. Fard to protect the organization from external threats (such as the police and the FBI). Sometimes referred to as the “secret army”, the FOI protects the organization from infiltration that might destroy it and from threats both from outside and, more importantly, from inside as happened in several schisms during its history. As many people know, Louis Farrakhan, in his public appearances, is always guarded by security forces of the FOI’s members. It is their responsibility to provide security around the minister, the temple, and anywhere the NOI holds events, and to protect members from police and non-believers. Screening people who come to the temple or to their events is one of the FOI’s tasks. It has a simple but serious chain of command, from low to high: a lieutenant commands each squad of each FOI’s section; he then reports to the captain of the local temple; and the captain then reports to Supreme Captain in the Chicago headquarters. Members who want to join the FOI are recruited strictly among the physically and mentally healthiest and strongest and they have to go through a test of knowledge about the NOI. After passing the recruitment exam, they have to sign a secret oath (Marshall, 1996, pp. 45-47).

**The Nation of Islam as a Black Nationalist and a Social Movement**

When the NOI was founded, as told by Clifton Marsh (1996) in *From Black Muslims to Muslims*, America was in a critical socio-economic situation after World War I which was followed by the Great Depression that provoked African Americans’ restlessness. In the period of affluence, after they migrated from southern states to northern states during the Great Migration, they had a lot of hopes but those hopes were
then crushed by the Great Depression. Their status dropped; they became anxious, unsatisfied, and frustrated (Marsh, 1996, p. 7). Living in poverty in ghettos, they had to fight against whites for jobs and they often lost. These bad conditions in the era of what Marsh describes with the words “hunger, discontent, anguish, and disillusionment” encouraged Black Nationalism as an alternative for African Americans (ibid., p. 17).

Henceforth, the NOI has mostly served as a social movement whose aim is to transform or protect the black society in terms of the relationships among its members and in political and economic structures (ibid., p. 1). In Lincoln’s (1994) terms, it will be “the United Front of Black Men” which espouses racial and economic separation (pp. 79-80). Marsh (1996) adds that it also serves as a black nationalist movement to generate pride of their race and culture and to raise consciousness among African Americans (p. 7).

The Roles of the Nation of Islam in Developing the Black Community

Notwithstanding its controversy, the NOI, both as a religious organization and a social movement, has a role which is as significant as Black Christian churches in building the black community. In the economic sector, it encourages and establishes businesses which employ African Americans and work for the development of the black community. Dr. Devissi Muhammad affirmed that the NOI creates jobs for African Americans as a part of its economic movement (Devissi Muhammad, personal interview).

He described the NOI’s business in the golden years 1960s, as follows:

The Nation of Islam and its membership in the 1960s and early 1970s had businesses of all sorts. We had farmlands, groceries to grow food, and distributed food to various parts of the country, to various supermarkets owned by the people in the Nation of Islam. That’s just an example. The
Nation of Islam would have its own factories, educational institution, its own export-import business bringing in various types of fish and making various deals with foreign countries to import the fish. We can say that in the 1960s and early 1970s, for the first half of 1970s, the Nation of Islam was more established under Elijah Muhammad’s leadership (Devissi Muhammad, personal interview).

Despite its decline in terms of business, the NOI under Louis Farrakhan today still continues establishing its business sector. The Gordon’s Meat Market on 327 Blue Hill Avenue near Boston Temple (Marshal, 1996, p. 51) is one example. The NOI is able to build its own businesses independent of whites. In fact, in my interview with Dr. Djisovi Eason, Dr. Eason stated that it was amazing that a black organization in the 1960s could have jet planes to transport its products. He recalled:

I remember Elijah Muhammad on the first plane, the Nation of Islam’s first cargo plane that I knew was owned by black man. They would carry the newspapers across the country in this plane and sometimes they would use (it) for various businesses in average. That aero plane was quite impressive to me. Black people just didn’t own aero plane back in those days. Its ability to provide jobs for black people if you wanted to be self sufficient….They had necessary international contact for me to be able to sell fish as much fishes I wanted to sell, you know, because they had set up international import export businesses with other countries, which is something that does not exist anymore for black people pretty much. (It had) the ability to develop black unity culture nationalism or, if you will, nationalism among
black people. The Nation of Islam was crucial in terms of aligning itself with leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr. and will you go on and on and on, even today. If you look at the symbol of the Black Muslim movement now—Louis Farrakhan—you see him at the height of such an event as One Million Man March where you have one million black men and some women from all walks of life, from all religions, etc. (Djisovi Eason, personal interview).

The NOI also has a significant role in educating black people. In its teachings on religion and morality, it asserts the values of cleanliness (including healthy diet and prohibition of drugs, alcohol, and adultery), discipline, independence, racial pride and self-help, mutual cooperation and brotherhood within its own race, and family values reasserting the roles of the black man as a responsible figure of the head of the family, father, and husband while at the same time stressing respect for women. Family values are a part of education in the NOI in which both men and women share the responsibility to rebuild the black family through which problems in the black community may be addressed more immediately. Other than giving religious teaching in a class called Student Enrollment, the NOI also educates its members regarding (patriarchal) familial responsibilities. When male members are taught to be good men, female members are taught to be good women who can cook, sew, and behave gracefully in a class called Muslim Girl’s Training and General Civilization Class (MGT and GCC, respectively) (Haley, 1992, pp. 247-248, Marshall, 1996, p. 47). The NOI believes that education is a way to improve life. Also for that purpose it established the University of Islam comprising elementary and high schools with longer school days than ordinary schools.
In addition, the NOI’s leadership in the Million Man March must not be overlooked. Concerns such as female-headed black families without a father or male figure (because a lot of black men are in jail while some others abandon their familial responsibilities), poverty, black crimes, and the number of black males in jail compared to its proportion encouraged the NOI under Louis Farrakhan to gather and lead the masses of black men in the Million Man March in 1995 and 2005. That mass gathering of African Americans was considered as the black man’s atonement and a means of encouraging black men to develop themselves—to be more committed to improving themselves, their families, and the black community. Since men were the target of the atonement, the call for the march was mainly for men while women were encouraged to stay at home, pray, teach their children, and give moral support to husbands who went to the march—a thing that earned both praise and criticism from the public and women. The African American leaders in the march addressed not only the issues in the black community and the Black Agenda for a better life, freedom, justice, and equality, but also the reassertion of family values and responsibilities upon which African Americans must reflect to improve themselves as a people of dignity. Despite politicians’ (mainly whites) criticisms on Louis Farrakhan’s leadership such that they wanted the message to be separated from the messenger, the march was able to unify African Americans through psychological and moral messages.
CHAPTER II. PAST DIVISIONS IN THE NATION OF ISLAM

Malcolm X versus Elijah Muhammad

When Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad parted, it marked the end of the glorious years of the old (pre-Farrakhan) NOI. Their relationship can be described as that of teacher and student, father and son, and they ended up being enemies. Malcolm X, upon his joining the NOI, became the most important figure in the NOI. His career moved fast from a new convert to the most trusted lieutenant, assistant minister, minister, and, finally, a national minister, national spokesman and representative of Elijah Muhammad.

A Short Biography of Malcolm X

During his lifetime Malcolm X had been through revolutionary transformation consisting of both emotional and intellectual growth. He went from being a hustler and an angry, resentful and rebellious young man to one of the most notable leaders in America and an (orthodox) Islam convert. In his youth he submitted to the white standard of style and beauty such that he straightened his hair instead of letting it grow naturally. He changed from a person who was no stranger to the dark world of drugs, alcohol, crime, and the American life-style of premarital sex into a brave African American leader who completely reformed his life-style in favor of cleanliness and discipline as taught by Elijah Muhammad’s NOI.

As he shifted his ideology from Elijah Muhammad’s version of Islam to orthodox Islam, following his clash with Elijah Muhammad and his split from the NOI, Malcolm X became less averse to integrationist as he finally acknowledged that despite the different methods used by separatist and integrationist, both struggled for the same aim—black liberation—and from the same oppressor—white people.
In the end, he died as a martyr. Yet, his life’s end was so tragic for it is still unclear who actually killed him, whether it was the NOI or the FBI who used the conflict between Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad / the NOI to make it appear as though it was the NOI who killed Malcolm X. Talmadge Hayer, the only assassin caught in the crime scene among the three convicted murderers of Malcolm X, claimed that Thomas Johnson and Norman Butler, the other two convicted murderers, were innocent and instead gave the names of other suspects escaping from the crime scene ("Talmadge Hayer", "Thomas 15X Johnson", "Norman 3X Butler"). Unfortunately, according to Marshall (1996), the authorities disregarded demands to open the case based on Talmadge Hayer’s allegation (p. 75). Thomas Johnson and Norman Butler were finally paroled after twenty-two years in prison. Thomas Johnson tried to reopen the case and to obtain confidential files from the New York City Police Department which had the assassination report, but the police refused to release the files (pp. 75-78).

Malcolm X’s life can be described as harsh as any other black men of his age. Born as the lightest skinned child among his siblings, which was possibly due to the fact that his mother’s father was a white man, young Malcolm X, residing in Boston and New York, made his light skin as a status symbol just like other light skinned blacks in those cities. Later in his life, after he became aware of Elijah Muhammad’s teaching of blacks’ racial pride and antipathy toward white devil, he was ashamed of the white “rapist” (Haley, 1992, p. 5) blood in him. From his turbulent childhood and teenage years after losing his father when he was six, Malcolm X had enough experiences of the bitterness of African Americans’ lives under the American system of racism and discrimination. His father, a Baptist minister and a dedicated supporter of Marcus Garvey’s UNIA, was
probably killed by Klansmen, a white racist organization called Black Legion—a subsect of the KKK—which sent death threats to his father during his civil rights activism in which he was involved toward the end of his life. Four of his uncles, out of his father’s six brothers, were killed by white men (one was by lynching, another one was shot by white police in the North). His father was also killed by white men. Malcolm X’s house was burnt by white enemies when he was four. His mother became mentally ill after the death of his father and had to seek treatment in a mental institution while the children were scattered between orphanages and foster homes. As an excellent student in his junior high, Malcolm X once told one of his teachers that he wanted to be a lawyer. Ironically the teacher replied that it was not realistic for a “nigger” to be a lawyer. Given his intelligence he very well could have been a lawyer. This proved that during that time racism was so inherent to all American institutions that even a teacher as an educator could be as racist as American society which inhibited the potential of many African American students in particular and black people in general. Though Malcolm X was a smart and top student in his high school, he dropped out and moved temporarily to Boston and worked in miscellaneous jobs. Later he came to Harlem, New York, where he committed petty crimes and then in 1942 got involved in an organized crime ring which dealt with drugs, prostitution and gambling. He finally ended up in jail for committing burglary in Boston in 1946 (Haley, 1992, pp. 3-164, “Estate of Malcolm X”, par. 2-3).

Malcolm X was quite wild when he was young. When he was in jail, he was called satan by his inmates for his “anti-religious rhetoric” (Marshall, 1996, p. 31). He could still obtain drugs secretly from corrupt prison guards, and he was so rebellious that he was often put in solitary confinement. He started his journey of enlightenment and
self-reformation in prison where he met and began to be interested in a fellow inmate called Brother Baines, a follower of Elijah Muhammad who introduced him to Muhammad’s teachings. Baines was wise and respectable and had knowledge in some fields such as philosophy, history, politics, and even religion that captured Malcolm X’s curiosity. Malcolm X then began to study on his own from pages in the dictionary from the prison’s library. His brothers, Reginald and Philbert, tried to convert him into the NOI. Reginald, who had just converted and joined the NOI, often came to visit Malcolm X in prison and attracted him with the story of the NOI and what its leader taught.

It was in the prison that Malcolm X, for the first time in his life, had heard of an organization with such a vision of separatism and a belief that white supremacy would never let African Americans accomplish progress and success and reach freedom, justice, and equality and therefore African Americans must help and fight for themselves. Malcolm X was so enlightened that he began to study on his own in prison and regularly wrote to Elijah Muhammad from whom he got lessons in religion and history through the Muhammad’s replies to the letters he continuously sent from prison. Malcolm X was evangelized. His personality improved and he became such model prisoner that he got parole in 1952 (Marshall, 1996, pp. 31-32).

Soon after his release Malcolm X moved to Detroit where he joined the NOI, met with Elijah Muhammad in September the same year, adopted last name X and dropped his slave name Little. It was a practice in the NOI that each member was given a Muslim last name (usually Muhammad) by Elijah Muhammad reflecting nature of the individual member’s personality and (e.g. contribution to the organization, act of loyalty to the leader and the organization, and characters) (Marshall, 1996, p. 32). Unfortunately, no
matter how great Malcolm X’s dedication to Elijah Muhammad was and how much he contributed to the NOI, he was never given a Muslim last name and his conflict with Elijah Muhammad became so severe that Malcolm X became the enemy of the NOI.

**Two Versions of a Conflict**

There are two versions of the conflict between Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad, one is from what was told by Malcolm X (Malcolm X’s version) and the other is from the NOI’s version which is against Malcolm X’s. In general, what is publicly known regarding the conflict surrounding Malcolm X’s split from the NOI is his conflict with Elijah Muhammad upon learning about Elijah Muhammad’s secret sexual relations with several Muslim women that shook his faith in Muhammad (Haley, 1992, p. 322-327) and his ideological shift from the NOI’s Islam to a more universal Islam which enabled him to recognize problems in the NOI’s ideology (ibid, pp. 348-373). Most American history books about Malcolm X (except those written by the NOI’s historians), when it comes to the conflict between Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad, tell what the NOI considers to be Malcolm X’s version because it is him (and less the NOI) in whom people are interested, especially after the worldwide success of Spike Lee’s (1992) film *Malcolm X* based on Alex Haley’s (1992) book, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley*, which earned Malcolm X a prophet-like status as the most fearless African American leader.

His great image as a hero—a brave and fearless African American leader not afraid of being against the political mainstream of the civil rights movement and against the American government and the white ruling political elites, not afraid of sounding the bitterness of African Americans’ lives in a tumultuous era of the 1960s with his
straightforward and blunt criticism and comments when other African American leaders only dared to whisper to themselves or among their own people or followers—makes him a legend and a myth who continuously attracts Americans, black and white, and even foreigners who learn about American history. When it came to the NOI, Malcolm X was concerned by comments in the black community such as the NOI was “talk only” (only acted when a Muslim was involved) that it would one day be “separated from the Negroes’ front-line struggle” (Haley, 1992, p. 317). Therefore, Malcolm X began to “act”. Once he brought a group of the FOI to a police station to confront them for beating a Muslim brother. It was contrary to Elijah Muhammad’s position of refusing to deal with the police (Marshall, 1996, p. 70).

Among the books written on Malcolm X, the most famous one is Alex Haley and Malcolm X’s (©1964) *The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley* through which most people know about Malcolm X. The film, based on the autobiography and careful research conducted by the filmmaker prior to production, is also another source of knowledge from which people learn about the life of Malcolm X. In contrast to what is told in that book, though, the NOI has its own version of the conflict between the two most powerful men in the NOI during the 1960s.

This thesis does not attempt to justify which version of the conflict is correct. It merely presents two points of view of the conflict; one is well-known publicly from Spike Lee’s (1992) film and Alex Haley’s (1992) autobiography of Malcolm X, while another one is not widely known, except among the NOI’s members. The aim of presenting two versions is to offer an analysis of the justification of each side (Malcolm X’s side and Elijah Muhammad’s / the NOI’s side) and to encourage historians to further
investigate the real perpetrator of the assassination and what motives led to it. Finding the real actor behind it may, or may not, have an effect on race relations in the U.S. Yet, it may reveal a dark secret of American history which both black and white people must reflect upon in hopes of improving present and future ways of acting, behaving, thinking, making and realizing public policy with respect to race relations in order to be able to make the African Americans’ dream of equality, freedom, and justice a reality.

**Malcolm X’s Contribution to the Nation of Islam**

Malcolm X’s role in developing the NOI was significant. He was not the one who founded the organization, but he was the one who built it from a small unknown sect into an influential and a national scale organization. In his book, Marshall (1996) elaborates Malcolm X’s contribution to the organization (p. 68). According to Marshall, Malcolm X started the NOI’s first official newspaper *Muhammad Speaks* (first produced in his house) whose distribution at the time of its popularity reached 800,000. He sent the NOI’s messages across the country with his writings in the media (newspaper) and through his speakings in the electronic media (radio and television). He negotiated the purchase of lands which later became the NOI’s property. His confession that he negotiated on behalf of the NOI with the KKK for a piece of land for the NOI’s separatist program was in accordance with the FBI report of the meeting between the KKK, whose leader’s name was coded as “Old Six”, and the NOI in Atlanta in 1961 for the purpose of buying land for a separatist program (Marshall, 1996, p. 68). He also established some of the NOI’s temples. Partly due to his appeal and his sharp and inflammatory oratory that attracted a lot of people, he was able to raise the membership considerably within a
relatively short period of time, “from 500 in 1952 to 30,000 in 1963” (“Estate of Malcolm X”, par. 4).

**Malcolm X’s Career in the Nation of Islam**

Malcolm X’s career in the NOI began in the Detroit Temple. One year afterwards, Malcolm X, who preached at the temple once in a while, was appointed as an assistant minister. Ministry is a full time job such that Malcolm X eventually had to quit his job at Ford Motor where he had been working. Malcolm X soon earned Elijah Muhammad’s trust so he was asked to establish the temple in Boston and in some other cities (e.g., Detroit, New York, Michigan, Harlem, and Philadelphia) in the United States. Thus, by 1960 there were already 69 temples in 27 states. Malcolm X became the minister of Temple Seven in Harlem in 1954 and Elijah Muhammad’s first National Representative and Spokesman who got the honor of introducing Muhammad in the NOI’s rallies (Marshall, 1996, pp. 32-54).

Intelligent and articulate, Malcolm X eventually exceeded his teacher’s national popularity as he frequently appeared and spoke on Elijah Muhammad’s behalf due to Muhammad’s poor health. Moreover, Malcolm X became very popular due to his oratory skill and due to the contents of his controversial and provocative anti-white speeches. It could be said that Malcolm X was a crucial factor that brought the NOI to its popularity during the 1960s. This organization was barely known among whites and the American public generally until Malcolm X’s appearance on a TV program in 1959 called “The Hate That Hate Produced” which also played a documentary video of an NOI’s rally with a massive gathering of more than 10,000 people in Washington DC that shocked America

The crowds and controversy surrounding Malcolm made him a media magnet. He was featured in a week-long television special with Mike Wallace in 1959, The Hate That Hate Produced, that explored fundamentals of the Nation of Islam and Malcolm's emergence as one of its most important leaders. After the special, Malcolm was faced with the uncomfortable reality that his fame had eclipsed that of his mentor Elijah Muhammad. Racial tensions ran increasingly high during the early 1960s. In addition to the media, Malcolm's vivid personality had captured the government's attention. As membership in the Nation of Islam continued to grow, FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) agents infiltrated the organization (one even acted as Malcolm's bodyguard) and secretly placed bugs, wiretaps and cameras surveillance equipment to monitor the group's activities (“Estate of Malcolm X”, par. 5-6).

Malcolm X became such an influential political figure that he was often invited to speak at universities including Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Howard, and Brown (Haley, 1992, p. 307). He was even offered the opportunity to run for Rev. Adam Clayton Powell’s congressional seat (Marshall, 1996, pp. 55-56). Malcolm X not only became famous but he also became a threat to the (white) government. As a result, he was under the FBI’s surveillance inside the country and the CIA’s when he was performing pilgrimages outside the United States. Later, the FBI’s surveillance file on Malcolm X that contains the FBI’s documents which were assembled as a part of the FBI’s counterintelligence program was published, first, in the form of microfilm by Scholarly Resources in 1978 and, then, in a book edited by David Gallen in 1995. Up to this day,
the FBI’s role in the death of Malcolm X is still a mystery despite many people’s suspicion that the FBI was behind the conspiracy.

**Fame and Jealousy**

Malcolm X’s fame created enemies not only in whites but also in his own brothers in the NOI. Marshall (1996) notes that Malcolm X’s fame also aroused envy among NOI’s ministers (p. 41). Some people believed that even Elijah Muhammad was jealous of his popularity. Malcolm X felt it. “I was to learn, from Mr. Muhammad’s own sons, that he was envious because he felt unequipped to speak at colleges himself” (Haley, 1992, p. 310). *Muhammad Speaks* gradually ignored his contribution. Malcolm X said:

Both white people and Negroes—even including Muslims—would make me uncomfortable, always giving me so much credit for the steady progress that the Nation of Islam was making. “All praise is due to Allah,” I told everybody. “Anything creditable that I do is due to Mr. Elijah Muhammad.” I believe that no man in the Nation of Islam could have gained the international prominence I gained with the wings Mr. Muhammad had put on me—plus having the freedom that he granted me to take liberties and do things on my own—and still have remained as faithful and as selfless as servant to him as I was. I would say that it was in 1962 when I began to notice that less and less about me appeared in our Nation’s *Muhammad Speaks*. I learned that Mr. Muhammad’s son, Herbert, now the paper’s publisher, had instructed that as little as possible be printed about me. In fact, there was more in the Muslim paper about integrationist Negro “leaders” than there was about me. I could read more about myself in the European, Asian, and African press (ibid., p. 319).
Malcolm X sacrificed a lot for the NOI. He gave most of the money he gained from his speaking activities to the organization rather than to himself and his family which caused a “domestic quarrel” (Haley, 1992, p. 318) with his wife. But his passionate devotion to the NOI could not stop the jealousy and the rumors that had started to appear around 1960-1961 about how Malcolm X wanted to “take credit” for Elijah Muhammad’s teachings, to replace him and “take over” the organization, to “build an empire” for himself, and that he liked to play “coast-to-coast Mr. Big Shot” (ibid., p. 317).

Marshall (1996) verifies that by then the FBI had infiltrated Malcolm X’s temple in Harlem and one of Malcolm X’s close friends was an informant. In a memo to his superior, a secret FBI agent reported that “the subject (Malcolm X) is trying to form a nucleus in the Nation of Islam, though the subject (Malcolm X) always refers to Wallace Deen Muhammad, Elijah’s son, as the logical successor” (Marshall, 1996, p. 55). Whether what the “unidentified government operative” (p. 55) said was indeed correct, it was not clear whether Malcolm X really intended to be Elijah Muhammad’s successor or whether that was just an assumption fostered by the rumors and jealousy toward Malcolm X that flourished around that time.

To the contrary with the rumors, in Malcolm X’s version, he never intended to replace Elijah Muhammad’s leadership or to take over the NOI. In fact, he always attributed every speech he made to the honor of Elijah Muhammad. He was hurt by the rumor and was mad when Farrakhan, as told by C. Eric Lincoln, in his meeting with Malcolm X, Alex Haley, and Lincoln himself, said to Malcolm X, “Why don’t you stop all this ‘Mr. Muhammad’ and go out and lead your own movement? Man, you could….” (qtd. in Marshall, 1996, p. 55). Before the sentence finished, Malcolm X exploded.
Causes of Splitting

There were three major factors that led to the split of Malcolm X from the NOI. Marshall (1996) explains quite clearly in his book the events that led to the severe conflict between Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad / the NOI. The first thing was that, as explained above, Malcolm X became more famous and a bigger figure in the movement than his teacher. His fame aroused envy and rumors that he would take over the organization and that he wanted to succeed Elijah Muhammad. The second thing was a revelation regarding Elijah Muhammad’s private life. Malcolm X’s faith in the man to whom he had dedicated himself for eleven years was shaken by Muhammad’s women scandal (herein lies a critical difference between the two accounts of the conflict). The third was Malcolm X’s comment on the assassination of President Kennedy.

The Issue of Elijah Muhammad’s Women

Let’s compare Malcolm X’s version to the NOI’s version concerning the scandal in Elijah Muhammad’s private life. According to Malcolm X, in the early 1960s he began to investigate a rumor regarding Elijah Muhammad’s private life which had started in 1955 and persisted (Haley, 1992, p. 323-324). Malcolm X visited three women who maintained that their children, who bore resemblance to Elijah Muhammad, were fathered by his spiritual leader, teacher, and guide who refused to sign their birth of certificates that would enable them to register for school (Malcolm X). Those women, who were former personal secretaries of Elijah Muhammad, also said that Elijah Muhammad told them that Malcolm X was his best minister but Malcolm X would one day leave and turn against him. “I learned from these former secretaries of Mr. Muhammad that while he was praising me to my face, he was tearing me apart behind my
back” (Haley, 1992, p. 325), Malcolm X said. Hurt and shaken, Malcolm X still maintained his loyalty, but he was confused about how to answer the media’s questioning Elijah Muhammad’s women scandal and to react to people’s comments on the scandal. Newspapers’ headlines of the scandal gave him nightmares. In his effort to anticipate the answer in case it became public, Malcolm X reviewed the Qur’an and the Bible with the help of Elijah Muhammad’s son, Wallace Deen Muhammad, to find proof in the history of the prophets (of David, Moses, Noah, Lot) that a human’s personal weakness could be overshadowed by his achievement. With his revelation he came to Elijah Muhammad in Phoenix in April 1963, who, to his surprise, did not deny and even justified what he did with a prophetic reason—the “fulfillment of prophecy” (ibid., p. 327). Replying to Malcolm X’s inquiry, Elijah Muhammad said, “I’m David. When you read about how David took another man’s wife, I’m that David. You read about Noah, who got drunk—that’s me. You read about Lot, who went and laid up with his own daughters. I have to fulfill all of those things” (qtd. in Haley, 1992, p. 327). Malcolm X’s faith was shaken. As a result, from around 1963 he began to talk more about politics, social doctrine, and current events than about religion and morality (pp. 322-327).

To understand how devastated Malcolm X was upon finding Elijah Muhammad’s scandal, here was what he thought of Muhammad before the scandal: a sacred man. In my twelve years as a Muslim minister, I had always taught so strongly on the moral issues that many Muslims accused me of being “anti-woman.” The very keel of my teaching, and my most bone-deep personal belief, was that Elijah Muhammad in every aspect of his existence was a symbol of moral, mental, and spiritual reform among the American black people. For twelve years, I had taught that within the entire Nation of
Islam; my own transformation was the best example I knew of Mr. Muhammad’s power to reform black men’s lives. From the time I entered prison until I married, about twelve years later, because of Mr. Muhammad’s influence upon me, I had never touched a woman (Haley, 1992, p. 322).

In Malcolm X’s mind, the man who taught him virtues and influenced him not to touch a woman (other than his wife) turned out to be the man who committed adultery and worse that same man would rather hide than honestly admit what he did before his followers.

What began to break my faith was that, try as I might, I couldn’t hide, I couldn’t evade, that Mr. Muhammad, instead of facing what he had done before his followers, as a human weakness or as fulfillment of prophecy—which I sincerely believe that Muslims would have understood, or at least they would have accepted—Mr. Muhammad had, instead, been willing to hide, to cover up what he had done (Haley, 1992, p. 335).

Here was where Malcolm X disagreed with the NOI which considered what Elijah Muhammad had done, not as adultery but, as taking wives which is allowed in Islam. “If having wives disqualified the Honorable Elijah Muhammad from the honor and respect due him, then start disrespecting Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon and (Prophet) Muhammad,” said Jabril Muhammad, a Louis Farrakhan’s assistant (Marshall, 1996, pp. 58-59). The NOI took justification on Elijah Muhammad by comparing him with the Prophet Muhammad who also “took wives”. Using the right of the Prophet Muhammad, Louis Farrakhan justified his leader’s scandal in an article entitled “The Truth and Travails of a Prophet” in Muhammad Speaks, 31 July 1964 edition (ibid., p. 69). The
NOI’s members considered Elijah Muhammad as a messenger of Allah who had the same prophetic rights as the Prophet Muhammad. They were mad at Malcolm X because he did not use the Qur’an to defend Elijah Muhammad for it is mentioned there about the Prophet’s (Muhammad) right to take wives. Louis Farrakhan (and the NOI’s people) argued that Malcolm X knew better how to defend Elijah Muhammad but he did not do that (ibid., pp. 58-60). In his defense Elijah Muhammad wrote in Muhammad Speaks, 14 August 1964 edition, that Malcolm X was hurt and angry because one of the women he impregnated was the woman Malcolm X wanted to marry (ibid., pp. 69-70). This was supported by Louis Farrakhan (ibid., pp. 69-70) and Dr. Devissi Muhammad, who both said the same thing about the love triangle.

The Prophet’s Right and Polygamy in Islam

In Islam, prophets are defined as individuals “assigned a special mission by God (Arabic: Allah) to guide humanity” and to deliver His messages—whose essence is “what Islam calls for: worshipping God alone and rejecting false deities”—to all human being (“Prophets”). There are 25 prophets in the Qur’an; among others are Adam as the first, Abraham, Noah, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad as the seal. A few of the prophets who are assigned with holy books are called rasul (messengers). Based on what is mentioned in the Qur’an, therefore, Islam teaches that the Prophet Muhammad is the last prophet.

Based on the above Islamic definition of prophets, it can be inferred that the problem with the NOI’s argument in defense of Elijah Muhammad which quoted the Qur’an and reprimanded Malcolm X (for not using the Qur’an) is that Elijah Muhammad was not the Prophet Muhammad. No matter how big his contribution in reforming African Americans was and how virtuous his character was, he was just the same as
many other leaders in various countries who lead their people in their struggle for reformation whether that is psychologically, mentally, socially, economically, politically, ideologically, or religiously.

Instead of grounding from the Qur’an, the NOI’s prophetic view was apparently influenced by the definition of prophets in the African American religious experience in which preachers, from the past, could be considered as prophets. With the birth and growth of cults after the Great Migration, during and after the Great Depression up to the 1960s—when nobody could help the poor and powerless African Americans from the sufferings in their life experience—black cults’ leaders were often viewed by their followers as prophets who offered them help, salvation, guidance and hope. The problem with Elijah Muhammad’s prophetic status in the NOI is that, since the NOI uses the name Islam, it should consider a prophet from Islamic view rather than from the perspective of the African American experience, especially if the definition is not in line with the prophetic line as taught in Islam. If the NOI does not use the name “Islam”, it is probably still accepted that the NOI considers Elijah Muhammad as a prophet and has the same right as a prophet (the Prophet Muhammad).

Moreover, other than knowing about the Prophet Muhammad’s right to take wives, the NOI’s people, as Muslims, should have also known that the Prophet Muhammad was the last prophet and that the right to take wives is only for the Prophet Muhammad as mentioned in the Qur’an’s verse that they used to defend Elijah Muhammad: the Qur’an 33.50 (surah Al-Ahzab ayah 50). Because from the beginning they believed that Elijah Muhammad was God’s messenger, they thought that he had the same right as the Prophet Muhammad, who is also God’s messenger, to take wives.
Furthermore, it was not clear whether Elijah Muhammad really married those women. Even if he married all of them—even if the marriages were done secretly as later claimed by Louis Farrakhan—in a truly in Islamic way, since the NOI’s people argued using the Qur’an, Elijah Muhammad must equally provide for those women materially, mentally, and biologically. He must treat them equally and must not neglect any of them. If it was true he did not sign the birth certificate of his children, it meant that not only he failed to meet his responsibility as a father in an Islamic way but he also neglected his wives who had the right to ask for his signature for the children’s birth certificates.

It is true that in Islam a man can have up to four wives. However, it is only under certain conditions often not mentioned by the West when it attacks the Prophet Muhammad and polygamy in Islam without knowing the history of why the Prophet decreed that a man can have four wives. Long before the teaching of Islam by the Prophet Muhammad, polygamy had been practiced not only by Arabs but also in many other parts of the world. Men, at that time, could have a lot of wives (David, for example, had 100 wives). To limit the practice of polygamy with a lot of wives, the Prophet Muhammad said that a man could marry “up to four”. That was instituted after a lot of men died in a war leaving women without husbands and children without fathers as explained by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, an interpreter of the Qur’an.

In relation to polygamy, Abdullah Yusuf Ali makes it clear that the verse in the Qur’an allowing this practice came after the battle of Uhud and that became a convincing cause to marry more than one woman (Ali, cited in Nimer, 2002, p. 7). Mohamed Nimer (2002) adds that, “Polygamy was practiced widely in the pre-Islamic Mecca before the
Qur’an restricted it, which made monogamy the rule in Muslim life” (p. 7). That is why some Muslim countries such as Tunisia and Turkey forbid polygamy (p. 8).

Dr. Jamal Badawi (2000) in his article “Polygamy in Islamic Law” explains the legal status of polygamy in Islam.

The Verse that allows polygamy was revealed after the battle of Uhud in which many Muslims were killed, leaving widows and orphans for whom due care was incumbent upon the Muslim survivors. The translation of the verse is as follows: "If you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two, or three, or four; but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then (marry) only one…." (Qur’an 4.3).

Badawi (2000) observes that, from this verse, a number of facts are evident:

1) That polygamy is neither mandatory, nor encouraged, but merely permitted.

2) That the permission to practice polygamy is not associated with mere satisfaction. Rather, it is associated with compassion towards widows and orphans, a matter that is confirmed by the atmosphere in which the verse was revealed.

3) That even in such a situation, the permission is far more restricted than the normal practice which existed among the Arabs and other peoples at that time when many married as many as ten or more wives.

4) That dealing justly with one’s wives is an obligation. This applies to housing, food, clothing, kind treatment, etc., for which the husband is fully
responsible. If one is not sure of being able to deal justly with them, the Qur’an says: "then (marry) only one" (Qur’an 4.3). This verse, when combined with another verse in the same chapter, shows some discouragement of such plural marriages. The other verse plainly states: "You are never able to be fair and just between women even if it is your ardent desire…” (Qur’an 4.129). The requirement of justice rules out the fantasy that man can "own as many as he pleases”. It also rules out the concept of a "secondary wife", for all wives have exactly the same status and are entitled to identical rights and claims over their husband. It also implies, according to the Islamic Law, that should the husband fail to provide enough support for any of his wives, she can go to court and ask for a divorce.

5) That the verse says "marry", not kidnap, buy or seduce. What is "marriage" as understood in Islam? Marriage in Islam is a civil contract which is not valid unless both contracting parties consent to it. Thus, no wife can be forced or "given" to a husband who is already married. It is thus a free choice of both parties (Badawi).

Unfortunately, even Muslim men who practice polygamy do not really understand polygamy as set forth by Islamic law in the Qur’an and they practice it wrongly. In the case of Elijah Muhammad, if he really married those women, he should have provided them with their rights equally, as explained in fact number four above. It is no wonder that the misunderstanding and malpractice of polygamy by Muslim men worsens Western’s misunderstanding of polygamy in Islam, which actually set forth not only the
conditions in which a man is permitted to practice polygamy but also the woman’s rights concerning polygamy.

_Louis Farrakhan, the Defender of Elijah Muhammad_

Louis Farrakhan, who distinguished himself from Malcolm X as more spiritual rather than political (Marshall, 1996, p. 38), admitted that Malcolm X was his teacher and brother. It was Malcolm X who taught him “how to be a man” (ibid., p. 37) and guided him in his study of the Bible and the Qur’an. They were close, but their relationship was between senior and junior; it was not something personal but professional. Malcolm X was also Louis Farrakhan’s role model as a minister. In his early sermons Louis Farrakhan imitated Malcolm X’s oratory almost perfectly using his strong memory of everything Malcolm X said and the way he delivered his speeches. For that reason, he was called “Little Malcolm”. He was like, in Louis Farrakhan’s words, “a carbon copy of Malcolm” (ibid., p. 38). Malcolm X was Elijah Muhammad’s left hand and the most trusted minister. He was assigned to search for and promote ministers. Louis Farrakhan was one of those promoted by Malcolm X (as assistant minister who later promoted as minister of Boston Temple by Elijah Muhammad himself).

Louis Farrakhan loved Malcolm X for his devotion to Elijah Muhammad. Accordingly, when he thought Malcolm X was against his teacher and had betrayed the organization, he defended Elijah Muhammad and became the greatest enemy of Malcolm X. He fiercely repudiated Malcolm X through his series of articles in Muhammad Speaks entitled “Minister Who Knew Him Best: Part 1” (8 May 1964 edition), “The Truth About: Fall of a Minister” (5 June 1964 edition), and the most controversial one that later led people to think of Louis Farrakhan’s involvement in the assassination of Malcolm X,
“Boston Minister Tells of Malcolm-Muhammad’s Biggest Hypocrite” (4 Dec. 1964 edition). In that 4 December 1964 edition, Louis Farrakhan castigated Malcolm X, as well as Wallace Deen Muhammad for being in Malcolm X’s side, and wrote a death threat to Malcolm X (Marshall, 1996, pp. 69-72). Farrakhan wrote, “The die is set and Malcolm shall not escape, especially after such evil, foolish talk about the benefactor in trying to rob him of the divine glory of which Allah has bestowed upon him. Such a man as Malcolm is worthy of death” (qtd. in Marshall, 1996, p. 72).

Defense or Betrayal?

There are two versions of stories with regard to Malcolm X’s actions upon getting Elijah Muhammad’s response regarding his scandal. According to Malcolm X, as told to Alex Haley (1992), he could not just be passive while the rumor continued to spread and the scandal even appeared in newspapers. He wanted to save the organization from self-devastation. In his effort to “prepare” the NOI’s ministers not to be surprised when they had to teach the prophecy’s fulfillment to their congregations in dealing with the dilemma of explaining the case of their leader’s women, he held a meeting with six East Coast officials. He discovered that some (including Louis Farrakhan) already knew of the scandal (Haley, 1992, pp. 325-327). He did not expect that what he thought as an effort to defend Elijah Muhammad by preparing his ministers would backfire him. “I never dreamed that they were going to try to make it appear that instead of inoculating against an epidemic, I had started it” (ibid., p. 327).

In contrast to Malcolm X’s chronology, Louis Farrakhan, as quoted in Marshall (1996), began the chronology of the conflict on Savior’s Day February 1963 in Chicago when Louis Farrakhan visited Wallace Deen Muhammad’s apartment (p. 63). In that visit
Louis Farrakhan was asked by Wallace Deen Muhammad to tell Malcolm X that Wallace Deen Muhammad wanted to tell Louis Farrakhan and Malcolm X something. Louis Farrakhan then told Malcolm X the message. Instead of meeting Wallace Deen Muhammad together with Louis Farrakhan, Malcolm X went alone to hear the news about Wallace Muhammad’s father’s private relationships with the women. Malcolm X, shocked, came back to New York but never mentioned it. Louis Farrakhan recalled that it was not until after Malcolm X’s suspension that Malcolm X told him about Elijah Muhammad’s “wives”. Before that, though, Louis Farrakhan himself had been made known of a secret of Farrakhan’s assistant minister’s fiancée, formerly Elijah Muhammad’s secretary, who confessed that her children were fathered by Elijah Muhammad (at that time Farrakhan even called Malcolm X to help calm down his assistant minister erupted by the confession). Instead of saving the situation, Louis Farrakhan asserted, Malcolm X’s meeting to “prepare” ministers and “protect” Elijah Muhammad rebounded on him as they reported what he did to Chicago headquarters (Marshall, 1996, pp. 55-61). Louis Farrakhan, believing that Malcolm X just wanted to “put a good face” (ibid., p. 60), said:

Malcolm became vindictive in his being sat down and then wanted to slander his teacher. Now (one of the) chapters (in Malcolm’s autobiography) puts a ‘good face’ on it (when Malcolm said) he wanted to ‘prepare’ the ministers on the East Coast. And then when one of them reported him to the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad sent for him and said, ‘Brother, this is what you are doing?’…
'Well, Brother, go back wherever you lit a fire, go back and put it out’
(qtd. in Marshall, 1996, p. 60).

Kennedy’s “Chickens Coming Home to Roost”

The relationship between Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad got more severe because of Malcolm X’s comment on the assassination of Kennedy. The comment was made in Manhattan Center, New York, where Malcolm X spoke in the stead of Elijah Muhammad who cancelled his speaking schedule. During that event which took place only a few days after the assassination, when asked by a journalist about his opinion on the assassination of President Kennedy, Malcolm X gave his blunt comment—“chickens coming home to roost” meaning the “hate in white men had not stopped with killing of the defenseless black people, but that hate, allowed to spread unchecked, finally had struck down this country’s Chief of State” (Haley, 1992, p. 329)—despite Elijah Muhammad’s order to all the NOI’s ministers not to comment (p. 329). As a result of his comment, Malcolm X was silenced for ninety days by Muhammad, who scolded him as a “Big Man” (qtd. in Marshall, 1996, p. 61). During his suspension, Malcolm X was neither allowed to speak publicly nor in his own temple. He was also not allowed to have a contact with other Muslims. Despite his humiliation, Malcolm X kept on performing his daily temple activities in submission to his leader. Ironically, his petition for reinstatement was again ignored by Muhammad though the suspension period was over.

Malcolm X felt that his Kennedy’s “chickens coming home to roost” was made an excuse as a part of the headquarters’ plot to dismiss him from the organization—“if not from this world” (Haley, 1992, pp. 333-334).
Any Muslim would have known that my “chicken coming home to roost” statement had been only an excuse to put into action the plan for getting me out. And the step one had been already taken: the Muslims were given the impression that I had rebelled against Mr. Muhammad. I could now anticipated step two: I would remain “suspended” (and later I would be isolated) indefinitely. Step three would be either to provoke some Muslim ignorant of the truth to take it upon himself to kill me as a “religious duty”—or to “isolate” me so that I would gradually disappear from the public scene (ibid., p. 334).

Malcolm X finally decided to break from the NOI and announced it in a press conference in New York on March 12, 1964. Then he founded two organizations, Muslims Mosque Inc. (Haley, 1992, p. 346), a religious orthodox Islam-directed organization, and the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), a black nationalist organization.

**Malcolm X’s Conversion to Islam**

At the end of his life, Malcolm X, as told to Alex Haley (1992) in his autobiography, was converted into (orthodox) Islam (pp. 345-397). When he was a follower of Elijah Muhammad, he did not want to open his mind and was annoyed when some white-skinned foreign Muslims from Arab countries he met in some conferences in the United States told him that he could have comprehended and embraced what they called the true Islam if only he was exposed to it.

After he lost his faith in Elijah Muhammad, his mind was opened and he began to wonder why Muslims in the NOI did not really want to learn about Islam despite their claim of being Muslims. He started to have religious dialogs with some Muslims of
orthodox Islam including his sister, Ella. Ella used to be a NOI’s member but then left the NOI and converted into orthodox Islam and founded a school that also teaches Arabic. She encouraged and funded Malcolm X to do a pilgrimage to Mecca.

It was in the journey of pilgrimage and in his direct contacts with Muslims all over the world that he had the revelation for the first time in his life of the oneness of human beings who—whatever their colors, races, nationalities, languages, and social status were—treated him and treated each other with the sincerest brotherhood he had ever seen in his life and who altogether submitted to the same one God as humble humans and as Muslims. Never in his life had he felt that he was no different even from those who in America would be called whites.

Also, for the first time in his life as a Muslim, he learned how Muslims observed their religion. “Imagine, being a Muslim minister, a leader in Elijah Muhammad’s Nation of Islam, and not knowing the prayer ritual” (Haley, 1992, p. 357). He talked about shalat, an obligatory ritual five-time daily prayer in Arabic, which is not commonly performed and only optional in the NOI. He recalled his own embarrassment when he was among other Muslims but did not know how to pray and he had to practice the proper posture and how to do ablutions before praying. Some Muslims who did not even understand English came to him with gestures and showed him how to pray. Malcolm X’s recollection of his difficulties in practicing how to pray deserves a long quotation to understand how the NOI teaches more of African Americans’ self-improvement than of the religion of Islam such that its (former) member does not know how to perform shalat which is not a mere ritual but is the foundation of the religion (of Islam), the reminder of
God’s gift and power over a human’s life and over all human conduct on earth that must be answered for on judgment day.

When my guide was down in posture, I tried everything I could to get down as he was, but there I was, sticking up…After a while, though, I learned a little trick that would let me get down closer to the floor. But after two or three days, my ankle was going to swell (Haley, 1992, p. 357). I made up my mind to let the guide do everything first and I would watch him. It wasn’t hard to get him to do things first. He wanted to anyway. Just outside the mosque there was a long trough with rows of faucets. Ablutions had to precede praying. I knew that. Even watching the Mutawaf’s (a person who guided a pilgrim party) helper, I didn’t get it right. There’s an exact way that an orthodox Muslim washes, and the exact way is very important.

I followed him into the mosque, just a step behind, watching. He did his prostration, his head to the ground. I did mine.

“Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful—”) All Muslim prayers begin that way. After that, I may have not been mumbling the right thing, but I was mumbling (ibid., p. 359).

In his article, “What’s in a name? The Problem with the Nation of Islam,” Young (2001) asserts that Malcolm X, after his pilgrimage, had a revelation that marked his ideological shift from Elijah Muhammad’s teachings. He began to realize that Islam teaches equality and, hence, disagreed with the NOI (and, therefore, Elijah Muhammad).
This religion recognizes all men as brothers. It accepts all human beings as equal before God, and as equal members in the Human Family of Mankind. I totally reject Elijah Muhammad’s racist philosophy, which he has labeled ‘Islam’ only to fool and misuse gullible people as he fooled and misused me. But I blame only myself, and no one else for the fool that I was, and the harm that my evangelical foolishness on his behalf has done to others (Malcolm X, qtd. in Young).

Contrary to Malcolm X’s version, Dr. Devissi Muhammad, representing the NOI’s view of the conflict between Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad as evident in the similarities of Dr. Devissi Muhammad’s version with Louis Farrakhan’s, told a version generally held by the NOI (Devissi Muhammad, personal interview). Dr. Devissi Muhammad had interviewed a lot of people who know Malcolm X. As a history professor and a long time NOI’s member, he is familiar with Malcolm X. He believed that Malcolm X was transformed for the most part, but he did not totally get rid of all his character flaws. Dr. Devissi Muhammad said that it was very tactical of Malcolm X to say that he was fooled by Elijah Muhammad. It was not the first time for Malcolm X to see white Muslims. Moreover, Dr. Devissi Muhammad added, Malcolm X knew already that the Prophet Muhammad, who is a righteous man, was white. Malcolm X also had visited some Arabic countries earlier and saw the same thing (white Muslims) as what he saw in Mecca, but he was not astounded by it. Dr. Devissi Muhammad argued that Malcolm X made his statement about Muslims with blue eyes and white skin in a calculating way to get followers because Malcolm X had lost his power base when he left the NOI (Devissi Muhammad, personal interview). Contrary to Dr. Devissi Muhammad,
Malcolm X said in his autobiography that numerous followers in Chicago (of Mosque Two, the headquarters) left the NOI upon learning of the scandal (Haley, 1992, p. 323).

To sum up, the scandal of Elijah Muhammad’s women, together with the disagreement between the NOI and Malcolm X with regard to the NOI’s pacifism in the political struggles of African Americans, led to the conflict between Malcolm X and the NOI. This led to his departure from the NOI. His departure led to his conversion to orthodox Islam—which in turn created more conflict that ended with Malcolm X’s death.

The Assassination of Malcolm X and the FBI Conspiracy

Both conflicted parties had their own arguments in attacking one another. This caused the public to think that the NOI was Malcolm X’s enemy which was most likely to desire his death, especially after Farrakhan’s death threat in Muhammad Speaks two months prior to the murder. Automatically, when Malcolm X was assassinated and the three convicts were the NOI’s members, the public suspected Farrakhan’s involvement.

Mystery still remains in the assassination of Malcolm X. In Marshall (1996), Louis Farrakhan argued that the FBI conspired to use the conflict between Malcolm X and the NOI to destroy both of them, to get rid of Malcolm X and to make it appear as if the NOI was responsible. Many people speculated that with Malcolm X’s strong political statements and his intention to bring the case of American injustice toward African Americans to the United Nations (and thus would embarrass the United States), the government (that always spied him through the FBI, as well as the CIA abroad) wanted to get rid of him as proven in an FBI’s file revealed in Marshall’s (1996) book.

Declassified FBI files reveal a memo that was sent from the Chicago bureau in January 1969 to J. Edgar Hoover, then head of the FBI. The
memo boasted that their Chicago-based agents had successfully made the fight between the Nation of Islam and Malcolm worse (p. 76).

Notwithstanding a strong belief in the FBI’s role in the assassination, Louis Farrakhan felt guilty about repudiating Malcolm X in such words that may have led a fanatical follower to want to kill Malcolm X. As a result, Louis Farrakhan was quiet when Malcolm X’s widow, the late Dr. Betty Shabazz (1936-1997), told the public that she could not forgive him. At a later time, though, she gave her support and blessing to his fundraising activity on her daughter’s (Qubilah Shabazz) behalf. That happened in 1995 when he helped show the innocence of Malcolm X’s daughter in a 1995 case of a murder plot to kill him (Marshall, 1996, pp. 226-230).

Despite the media’s effort to always connect him with Malcolm X’s assassination, he was never mentioned in Spike Lee’s (1992) film “Malcolm X”. Some believed that he threatened Spike Lee, but he asserted that he talked to Spike Lee and urged him not to make a film which mentioned the scandal of the NOI’s leader based on Malcolm X’s version alone. He also talked to him to make sure that the film would not make African American fight with his own brother and thus repeat the Malcolm X-Elijah Muhammad’s conflict—a conflict between African Americans which was used by the third party (the FBI, the U.S. “white” government) to destroy each of the African Americans involved in the conflict (Marshall, 1996, pp. 64-78), to face black brother against his own black brother, and thus faster self-destruction of black people in America.

**Wallace Deen Muhammad versus Louis Farrakhan**

Following Malcolm X’s departure from the organization in 1964 and his assassination in 1965, there were factional disputes and internal conflicts in the NOI at
the end of 1960s until the early 1970s when its members and ex-members (the dissidents) attacked each other’s mosques, shot and killed each other, as described by William Banks, Jr. (1997) in *The Black Muslims*. The threat of divisions became a real concern when the organization lost its leader, Elijah Muhammad.

**Succession of Leadership**

With the death of Elijah Muhammad in 1975, there was a problem of leadership succession when some important persons in the organization had their own ambitions to inherit the leadership of the organization which by then had grown into a major African American non-integrationist and exclusive organization with thousands followers (100,000 members by the early 1970s) and a great deal of money (approximately $70 million) from its successful businesses. Although Wallace Deen Muhammad, one of Elijah Muhammad’s sons, was fully crowned without any protest from any members among the thousands attending Savior’s Day in February 1975, two days after the death of Elijah Muhammad, what appeared to be a smooth transition was not actually that smooth (Marshall, 1996, pp. 102-108).

Long before the death of the Messenger, the NOI had always struggled within itself to eliminate different interests among its leaders. For that reason, Frank Kelleter (2000) comments on this organization as a group of gangsters with warfare and a series of attacks and killings inside the group rather than a religious organization with real (non-verbal) attacks on white people who are originally their “white devils” enemy. Marshall (1996) writes that Louis Farrakhan was the one who felt the bitterness with the appointment of Wallace Deen Muhammad as opposed to him. According to Louis Farrakhan, he had been privately talked by Elijah Muhammad as the heir or the would-
be-successor. On the contrary, the Muhammad family said that Elijah Muhammad never appointed Louis Farrakhan and Elijah Muhammad even, according to them, asked them to watch Louis Farrakhan as Muhammad suspected Farrakhan for trying to use the (Muhammad’s) family name to reach the leadership. To note, Louis Farrakhan married his two daughters with a grandchild and a nephew Elijah Muhammad’s, but Elijah Muhammad suspiciously did not attend the wedding (Marshall, 1996, pp. 100-106).

**Wallace Deen Muhammad’s Reformation**

Upon assuming the NOI’s leadership in 1975, Wallace Deen Muhammad carried out a radical reformation to the organization’s doctrines and teachings. With the radical changes taken by Wallace Deen Muhammad who converted the NOI’s ideology to the ideology of orthodox Islam, a way was open for Louis Farrakhan to restart the NOI as it was originally under his teacher, Elijah Muhammad. Wallace D. Muhammad (later changed his name into a Muslim name Warith Deen Mohammed and is also known as Imam W. D. Mohammed)—a person who had been a friend whom Malcolm X respected, when other people in the NOI hated Malcolm X, and to whom Malcolm X would come for opinions, religious thoughts, and guidance—made considerable changes within a short time after his appointment in June 1975.

Marshall (1996) describes how Wallace Deen Muhammad renounced his father’s teachings. He changed the name of Savior’s Day into Ethnic Survival Day and thus annulled the deity position of Fard Muhammad, the NOI’s founder, as God in (but Fard Muhammad regained his deity position after Louis Farrakhan rebuilt the NOI based on Elijah Muhammad’s teachings). He dismissed the racial doctrine of black superiority and white deviltry by announcing that white people could join the organization; one step
further than his ideological resemblance, Malcolm X after his pilgrimage to Mecca. He eradicated the separatist doctrine by erasing the demand for a separate territory within the United States as written in the organization’s official newspaper, *Muhammad Speaks*. He removed the organization’s businesses which were not profitable. He renamed minister into imam and temple into mosque.

Finally, he changed the NOI into a reformed organization with a new perspective and ideology by changing its name into the World Community of Al-Islam in the West (Muslim Community in the West). In addition, the newspaper *Muhammad Speaks* became *Bilalian News* (Marshall, 1996, p. 108), taken from Bilal, the first black Muslim who called for prayer. Again, this shows another effort for reformation that he did to lead the organization back to Islam. His commitment was proved further by starting a new class, twice a week, for the NOI’s ministers to study the Qur’an and Islamic prayers in Arabic (p. 108), like Muslims worldwide do when they read the Qur’an and perform daily prayers whatever their native languages are.

In politics Wallace Deen Muhammad also reformed his father’s position. In a PBS program “This Far by Faith”, Wallace Deen Muhammad told producer Valerie Linson (2003) about his faith and the reformation he did based on that faith. In that program Wallace Deen Muhammad explained that, unlike Elijah Muhammad, he encouraged Muslims to vote and register for military service. He was imprisoned for three years (1960-1963) only to meet his father’s pressure to avoid military service and refuse community service as a replacement (“Linson”).

In addition, he mentioned to Linson that he had always been eager to learn the Qur’an from where he was sure that what his father taught was not in accordance with
Islam. Since he was appointed as the minister of Temple 11 in Philadelphia in 1958, he began to teach basic Islam, such as prayers and the Qur’an’s passages which had never been touched by the NOI before. In fact, he was the first who taught the NOI’s members to read the Qur’an when other temples had not done it. However, he did it all thoughtfully so that people would not begin to suddenly question Elijah Muhammad’s sacred status. About five years later, when Elijah Muhammad’s women scandal was revealed in 1963, he wrote letters to the NOI’s ministers urging them to “tell the truth” and stop calling Elijah Muhammad God’s messenger. Wallace Deen Muhammad, reflecting on his father’s teachings, believed that Elijah Muhammad’s teachings were made outlandish for African Americans’ own improvement by directing them to be cleverer. That way it was hoped that in the future they would be encouraged to find a better guidance and a way of their own to achieve freedom. Refusing his father’s divinity, he was excommunicated five times. During those times, not only that he was unable to make contact with other Muslims and his own family, his wife and children also suffered from being persistently tormented by the NOI’s members. Following his reformation, many NOI’s members followed Farrakhan but most stayed with him and became orthodox Muslim (“Linson”).

Unlike Louis Farrakhan, his teaching is not only for African Americans but across races for he is not in favor of his father’s race-based theology and separatism. He is active in interfaith dialogs, in some projects including the Mosque Cares, in encouraging American Muslims to have their own business, education, and community, and is the first Muslim to give prayer in the Senate. He participated and gave Islamic prayer in the first Inaugural Interfaith Prayer Service (of President Clinton) in 1993 and four years later in the second time of the same event (“Warith”).
Warith Deen Mohammed and the Muslim Community

Since its foundation in 1975, the Muslim Community in the West under the leadership of Warith Deen Mohammed (Wallace D. Muhammad) has conducted several projects. Mohamed Nimer (2002) in *The North American Muslim Resource Guide* describes the programs and activities of Warith Deen Mohammed’s ministry. In the business sector, started in Chicago, Imam W.D. Mohammed (the name he is often called) runs a successful meat packaging business with American and worldwide Muslims’ connections. To encourage Muslims to do business, he launches his book *Islam’s Climate for Business Success*. Nimer reports that this ministry has its own website, a national radio program, and a TV program called “W. Deen Mohammed and Guests”, a weekly journal named the *Muslims Journal* covering Muslim issues and life, national and international news, and lately also local events. Like the NOI which sells tapes and videos of Louis Farrakhan’s preaching, this organization also sells those of Imam W.D. Mohammed’s. Today the Muslim Community (whose name has become the Muslim American Society or the MAS since 1997) under the Ministry of Imam W.D. Mohammed consists of around thirty-six schools and a hundred local congregations. Its mosques, although open to all Muslims of any skin colors, are mainly attended by African American Muslims. Every year the MAS holds a conference, the Islamic Convention, which is attended by not only its members but also common people, mostly African Americans of around six thousands people, many of whom are non-Muslims. In the MAS conference Imam W.D. Mohammed delivers his speech not specifically addressed to his Muslim followers but is across ethnicities and religions calling for unity. Also, as in the
NOI’s Savior’s Day event, some workshops, merchandise, and performances are featured during this MAS annual conference (Nimer, 2002, pp. 51, 71-72).

Impacted by the feminist movement, the Ministry of Warith Deen Mohammed also pays attention to women’s issues. The (African Americans) female members of the MAS who join the International League of Muslim Women (founded in 1984)—one of the MAS organ—become, for many other Muslims, “a good example of how American citizens in the age of globalism view the whole world as a natural domain for cultural and religious connectivity” (Nimer, 2002, p. 71).

Nimer (2002) adds that other than paying attention to women, the ministry also pays attention to the development of African Americans. It has some smaller community development groups among the black community. One of the groups is the National Community, famous for anti-crime and drug in the hood, under the leadership of Imam Jamil al-Amin (a.k.a. H. Rap Brown, formerly a civil rights activist and Justice Minister of the Black Panther in the 1960s who was sentenced for life imprisonment in 2002 for shooting two police officers and killing one of them). Every year it holds a sports event, Riyadhah, with participation from hundreds of youth (p. 71).

The structure of the MAS leaderships changed as new imams and activists joined it. In 1999 they dismissed the old Shura Council (consisting of major mosques’ Imams) and replaced it with the MAS Monitoring Team to promote participation among businessmen and professionals. The improvement of social aspects such as education, health, business, and housing are focused under specific committees. In the recent development of his organization, Imam W.D. Mohammed, now a member of the executive committee of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, has also began to
establish international ties. He visited some Muslim countries, and, following his visit to Vatican in 1996, he built connection with the Roman Catholic Focolare Movement. Then, in 1999 in Amman, Jordan, he attended the conference of the organization he now serves, the World Conference on Religion and (Nimer, 2002, p. 72).

The Reconciliation between Warith Deen Mohammed and Louis Farrakhan

After years of a cold relationship, Louis Farrakhan and Imam W.D. Mohammed reconciled in 2000. In that event, Farrakhan, under whom the NOI has apparently began to hold some aspects of Islam, showed the sign of accepting orthodox Islam. After that, however, he and his organization have kept on delivering Elijah Muhammad’s doctrines which are against Islam. Mohamed Nimer (2002) reports on the reconciliation below.

Another such group, the NOI, appeared to have been on the verge of transforming itself into a Muslim ethno-religious community-building organization. In February 2000 Imam Mohammed attended the NOI’s Savior’s Day event, where the Imam Mohammed and Louis Farrakhan declared their reconciliation of past conflicts. Farrakhan announced his faith in Muhammad the Prophet of Mecca. The Imam declared his acceptance of Farrakhan’s intention to join the mainline Islam. Sayed Said, the general secretary of ISNA (Islamic Society of North America), said the step was indicative of the movement’s growing interest in the Muslim faith. After the convention, however, NOI literature continued to print statements of belief contrary to the Muslim creed (such as the belief that God appeared in Detroit in 1930 in the person of Fard Muhammad, teacher of NOI Founder Elijah Muhammad) (p. 76).
Despite his knowledge of the religion of Islam, it seems that Louis Farrakhan and the NOI are reluctant to dismantle the NOI’s doctrines and to embrace Islam as the Ministry of Warith Deen Mohammed has done.

With the radical doctrinal changes from the teachings of Elijah Muhammad to the teachings of Islam and with the popularity of the new NOI under Louis Farrakhan, the old NOI, which then became the Muslim Community in the West under Imam W. D. Mohammed, is not what the public usually refer to when they talk about the NOI today. Instead, they usually refer to Louis Farrakhan’s NOI. The two organizations have different principles. One does not desire separatism but patriotism; the other one still believes in separatism within the U.S. territory. One submits to the U.S. government and its laws; the other one does not trust the government and its laws. One focuses on the improvement of African Americans, but opens itself to cooperation across ethnic groups (even welcomes whites in its membership) and with Muslims from various countries of origins, and is a part of the world Muslim community; the other one focuses on its own people’s struggle only. One is religious; the other one is more a social movement than a religious body. Nonetheless, both play important roles in developing African Americans.
CHAPTER III. TODAY’S NATION OF ISLAM UNDER LOUIS FARRAKHAN

Who does not know Louis Farrakhan? He was a figure whose name appeared more than any other African American leaders (except Jesse Jackson) in a poll conducted in February 1994 by Time/CNN as “the most important Black leader today” (Kambiz, 1997, p. 135). In the poll on 504 African Americans were familiar with, he gained 73 percent, 62 percent of which said that he was good for the black community (p. 135). He was the name behind the Million Man March. He is the name most often denounced by the media as a racist and anti-Semite. He is the leader of today’s NOI who is always as controversial, for both the West and the Muslim world, as the history of the NOI and the succession of its leadership.

Louis Farrakhan’s Resignation from the Reformed Organization

Marshall (1996) explains that when Louis Farrakhan was no longer able to compromise and stay together with Wallace Deen Muhammad, who had long had a lot of differences with him, Louis Farrakhan decided to leave the organization. Wallace Deen Muhammad offered him Temple Seven (which then became Mosque Seven) in New York, but he chose to depart from the reformed NOI. That temple was actually his old post where he earned success and fame as Elijah Muhammad’s number one minister who then became the NOI’s spokesman. At first he did not intentionally want to rebuild the organization and just wanted to continue his career in entertainment. Once an artist—a calypso singer who also played musical instruments such as violin and piano—he wanted to go back to entertainment by being a singer or directing a film on Malcolm X. He went to some Arabic countries such as Libya and Saudi Arabia in order to get financial support for the film he planned to direct. He went there before in his tour as an outrageous
spokesman of Elijah Muhammad’s NOI. Unluckily, his effort to get funding for the film failed. He came back to America when later he met another member of the NOI, Brother Jabril. He made up his mind to build Elijah Muhammad’s (not the reformed) NOI upon reading Brother Jabril’s manuscript of Jesus’ life. Peter, Jesus’ companion, reminded him not to deny (leave) and to stand up on his teacher which he interpreted as standing up on his teacher’s teachings and preserving them by rebuilding the NOI based on the original teachings of Elijah Muhammad (Marshall, 1996, pp. 109-110).

“Prophet of Rage”

The NOI under Louis Farrakhan today is full of controversy, as controversial as its leaders whose comments of anti-Semitism provoke anger among white people, especially the Jews. Frank Kelleter (2000) in his book *Con/Tradition: Louis Farrakhan’s Nation of Islam, the Million Man March, and American Civil Religion* writes that Farrakhan’s harsh comments earn him popularity (as a black leader) as well as bad reputations. Those bad reputations, coming from his adversaries including the Jews and the American (mostly whites’) public, among others, are “hatemonger” and “anti-Semite” (p. 10). These words, for example, were used by the Jewish Anti-Defamation League in its advertisement in a newspaper commenting on Farrakhan’s leadership in the Million Man March 1995 (Haskins, 1996, p. 135, cited in Kelleter, 2000, p. 10). Other bad reputations are “white America’s worst bogeyman” (Magida, 1996, p. xvi, qtd. in Kelleter, 2000, pp. 10-11), “prophet of rage” and “black Hitler” (Lincoln, 1994, p. 269, Gates, 1996, p. 124, Gardell, 1996, p. 253, qtd. in Kelleter, 2000, p. 10). Kelleter writes:

Revered by large parts of the African American youth as ‘the great Khan,’ an uncompromising leader who not only dares to talk back to the Anglo-
American establishment but also holds his own against perennial attacks from representatives of the black middle class, Farrakhan is at the same time denounced by liberal and conservative whites alike as a ‘prophet of rage’ or a ‘black Hitler’ (Kelleter, 2000, p. 10).

As a leader of a “religious” organization, he was once called “a racist cult leader” by an African American journalist, Stanley Crouch, in his criticism on the NOI (ibid., p. 10). The implication of such a calling is that if Farrakhan as the NOI’s leader is considered as a cult leader, it can also be interpreted that the NOI is a cult. In the history of black religion, cult is usually used to term a religious group outside historic Christian denominations. Many such cults were born among African Americans who were dissatisfied with Christianity and the church which they considered as passive, hypocrite, or inefficient in dealing with racial issues and African Americans’ socioeconomic problems (Sernett, 1972, pp. 464-472, 478-486, Wilmore, 1998, pp. 181-189).

Though the term *cult* is ambiguous and has a lot of meanings (“Rosedale”), the application of the term shows a cynical view of the speaker which may also represent the view of other parties who are skeptical or disrespectful of the NOI, for whatever reasons are. Thus, there is no wonder Robert Rockaway (1995), a Jewish scholar, calls the NOI “a sect of the larger Black Muslim religious group” (p. 9), by adding that all the NOI’s members are Black Muslims though it does not mean that all Black Muslims are the NOI’s members (see footnote in Rockaway, 1995, p. 9). Both the words *cult* and *sect* personify a certain feeling for the NOI. Furthermore, the designation of the word Black Muslims to address the NOI’s members—which does not necessarily mean that all Black
Muslims are the NOI’s members—implies the NOI’s difference from the Muslim world which does not attach skin color (race) or nationality before religious preference.

**Support from the Black Community**

Voicing the bitterness of African Americans’ lives, Louis Farrakhan gains a lot of support from lower and middle class African Americans although they do not necessarily look at or follow the NOI’s teachings. For African Americans, support for a black movement like the NOI is given not because of the NOI’s religious affiliation but because of the NOI’s commitment to African Americans’ struggles. To a certain extent, African Americans try to retain what they consider as black culture. An example of this is the adoption of Islamic names although the persons are not necessarily Muslims as opposed to people in Muslim countries when they have Islamic names. Thus, support for Louis Farrakhan from the under class and the middle class African Americans must be seen not as an adherence to or a definite agreement with the NOI’s ideology or teachings, much less with Islam, but as a shared spirit of struggle for the cause of their race.

Not only common people, some popular African American artists also support Louis Farrakhan (more precisely support his movement to uplift African Americans). Kelleter (2000) mentions, for instance, that Public Enemy, a famous hip hop/rap group, consistently sounded the NOI’s doctrines or beliefs in its lyrics. Louis Farrakhan, as well as Malcolm X, was mentioned in the acknowledgement of its album *It Takes A Nation of Millions to Hold Us*. The title of this 1988 album itself already reminds us of Louis Farrakhan’s (the NOI) Million Man March (p. 9). This group also wrote two songs, “Bring the Noise” and “Don’t Believe the Hype”, as a mark of respect to the NOI’s leader and an affirmation as Louis Farrakhan’s supporters (p. 9).
Louis Farrakhan’s cultural embracing is understandable remembering that before joining the NOI he was a professional entertainer who regularly played violin and piano and sang professionally as the “Charmer”—the nickname he earned by his charming on-stage performance. This continued for sometime until his early membership in the NOI. In fact, while he was already in the NOI, he produced and directed two plays entitled “The Trial” (about the trial of the white race for his crimes against African Americans) and “Orgena” (read, spelled from behind, a Negro), and wrote at least two compositions for the NOI called “A White Man’s Heaven Is A Black Man’s Hell” and “Look At My Chains” (Marshall, 1996, pp. 38-41; Rockaway, 1995, p. 15).

African American artists’ support for Louis Farrakhan based on respect and solidarity have been something usual if we also look at some other well established relationships and cooperation between artists and political or religious leaders. Other than Public Enemy there are also some other names such as Ice Cube, Ice T, and Sister Souljah with whom Farrakhan maintains a dialog (Marshall, 1996, p. 39). Their supports for him are something cultural rather than ideological. Those supports have something to do with racial rather than religious solidarity for it is clear that he does not focus himself and the NOI on its own religion (supposedly Islam). Rather, he leads the NOI toward interfaith cooperation, provided that they are African Americans. It is race that bounds them, not religion. No wonder that he becomes a cultural icon in the black community.

Hence, there is cohesion between Farrakhan and the black community. He supports African American artists and their works the same way they support him. As the National Minister to Youth, for example, he appointed Prince Akeem, a rapper, whose album *Coming Down Like Babylon* delivers Farrakhan’s message to the black youth. In
another African American artist’s video, Two Kings in a Cipher in *From Pyramids to Projects*, the FOI participated in behind the scenes. The NOI also sponsored events promoting African American cultural aspects in academic events, such as Abdul Haqq Islam’s launch of the first “Hip Hop At Its Crossroads: Seizing the Cultural Initiative” in a black prestigious university, Howard University (Marshall, 1996, pp. 39-40).

However, not all African Americans agreed with Louis Farrakhan. When Jesse Jackson’s presidential nomination in 1984 was threatened by Jackson’s remarks on the Jews, Farrakhan’s angry comments on the Jews in his defense for Jackson only made Jackson distance himself from Farrakhan. Prior to the publication of Jackson’s remarks in a newspaper, Jackson said something of the Jews in a private conversation that rolled the ball of Farrakhan-Jackson’s conflict. In an informal talk between Jesse Jackson and two newspapers’ reporters who were both African Americans, when being asked about American foreign policy concerning Israel and the Middle East, Jesse Jackson stated that there was “something wrong…with a policy that excites one nation—Israel and incites 23 others— the Arab world” (Marshall, 1996, p. 137). He then said, “Let’s talk black talk,” meaning that the conversation was supposed to be private among the three of them only, and went on saying, “That’s all Hymie wants to talk about is Israel. Every time you go to Hymietown, that’s all they want to talk about” (p. 137). Instead of keeping Jackson’s comment for himself, one of the reporters, Milton Coleman from the Washington Post wrote that comment in what was actually not the essence of the comment itself by saying that Jackson called Jews as “Hymies” and New York as “Hymietown” (p. 138)—which in turned aroused attacks and criticism from the Jewish community to Jackson.
Louis Farrakhan, a person famous for his antagonist views of Jews and back then was a supporter of Jackson’s presidential campaign, got so outraged by the Jewish public who criticized and attacked Jackson. Farrakhan attacked them back with his strongest comments on the Jews that earned him a nickname “black Hitler” (Kelleter, 2000, p. 25). Other than attacking the Jews, he also denounced Coleman for what he did to Jackson. His comments were so harsh that Jackson cut off his support for his campaign.

In the meantime, some African American leaders stated that they were not with Farrakhan in his criticism (ibid., pp. 23-55). Even the old NOI, which was already converted into orthodox Islam under Imam W. D. Mohammed, did not support his anti-Jewish remarks. Warith D. Mohammed publicly said, “What he teaches is not at all what we believe in…he represents the time of our struggle in the dark and a time of confusion in us and we don’t want to be associated with that all” (Marshall, 1996, p. 143).

**Louis Farrakhan’s Political “Countertraditionalism”**

In mainstream politics the NOI, whose leader (Louis Farrakhan) is famous for his militant comments, is considered to be politically conservative and has no strong political influence. Kelleter (2000) assures that the NOI remains in the periphery of African American politics because of its defiance from black mainstream politics (pp. 18-19). This contradiction of being militant in remarks but conservative in actions leads to Matthias Gardell’s comment on the NOI as “a rhetorically radical, but in any practical sense, a nonrevolutionary religion” (Gardell, 1996, p. 92, qtd. in Kelleter, 2000, p. 19). When other African Americans supported the integrationist point of view of the civil rights movement, the NOI criticized it and demanded separatism, and, thus, set it apart from the rest of the African Americans who fought for a different purpose. Furthermore,
the NOI’s religiosity separates itself from African American Christians although in many occasions its lectures include also the teachings of Christianity from the Bible, which make the NOI different from Islam, for both its Muslim members and African American non-Muslims as well. Regarding black political culture of integrationism versus separatism, Kelleter (2000) notes:

Farrakhan’s unorthodox countertraditionalism reflects a chasm in black political culture dating back at least to the debate between W.E.B. Du Bois’s NAACP and Marcus Garvey’s UNIA. In the fifties and sixties, this division separating mainstream integrationism from nationalist pan-Africanism, accommodating from a philosophy of racial pride, increasingly presented itself as a religious division, separating black Christians from Black Muslims. By making his audience face east, whereas King’s audience had looked west (the Million Man March versus the civil rights movement’s march), Farrakhan thus may have indulged in a revealing theatrics of geographical symbology, for the Nation of Islam never meant to turn to Western civilization for ideological inspiration (p. 17).

Kelleter adds that the rebirth of black militancy in the post-Martin Luther King’s era also did not increase the NOI’s political influence because from the beginning it never meant to “actively effect a revolutionary change in American’s political or economical systems” (p. 19). In his term, the NOI is apolitical (p. 19). It was not until Jackson’s candidacy for president in 1984 (p. 11) that the NOI allowed its members to get involved in politics by voting for Jackson under Democrat Party. Elijah Muhammad ruled out the withdrawal of
the NOI from politics, which he considered as corrupt. He urged his members not to get involved in it because the white supremacist government was not worth supporting.

**The Reactivation of the Nation of Islam in Politics**

With the candidacy of a black leader, Jesse Jackson, for the first time in the history of the NOI, Louis Farrakhan changed the organization’s policy. He not only urged the NOI’s members and all African Americans to support Jackson’s presidential campaign, but he also voted for Jackson. Marshall (1996) informs that on 9 February 1984, Louis Farrakhan, his wife, and 167 supporters gave support for Jackson by registering to vote for the first time (p. 56). To note, Farrakhan had known Jackson before Jackson’s presidential nomination. Their first acquaintance was in a Harlem riot in April 1972 when Farrakhan, as the Minister of Mosque Seven in Harlem, and Jackson, as the head of Operation Push (People United to Save Humanity), took control of the black mass who were angered by the police who intruded the NOI’s school, the University of Islam, while it was in session and incited a riot in Mosque Seven (pp. 88-93).

Unfortunately, their relationship could not last long as Jesse Jackson distanced himself from Louis Farrakhan who made an enemy of the American public during Jackson’s presidential campaign. Fueled by his anger at the Jewish attack on Jackson due to Jackson’s “hymie” and hymietown” (Marshall, 1996, p. 138) remarks, Louis Farrakhan attacked back the Jews with his comments that provoked criticisms from the public.

**Jesse Jackson’s Remarks and Louis Farrakhan’s Attack on the Jews**

No matter how strongly Louis Farrakhan tried to defend Jesse Jackson from the Jewish attacks and the American public, their relationship was finally broken when Jesse Jackson, politically threatened by Louis Farrakhan’s harsh statements on the Jewish
community, decided to distance himself from Louis Farrakhan and his support. Louis Farrakhan’s “fighting” with the Jews destroyed the Rainbow Coalition (included also the Jews and the NOI), a liberal political group which campaigned for Jesse Jackson. The NOI’s racial view did not fit the multiculturalist agenda of the rest of the group. Causing the destruction of the group and having been abandoned by the political ally he strongly supported, Louis Farrakhan strengthened African Americans’ suspicion that American politics was controlled by whites. Having been repudiated by his fellow African Americans, Louis Farrakhan still stood strongly. In fact, as Kelleter (2000) affirms, he has become a standard test for “white acceptance” (p. 11) up to this day.

Farrakhan’s involuntary disappearance from the 1984 campaign helped to reinforce the suspicion, already widespread among African Americans, that the rules of national politics were still being set by white interest groups. Even today, a black politician’s position in the political mainstream is determined largely by his or her stand on Farrakhan. As many commentators have noted, this makes the leader of the NOI into something of a litmus test for white acceptance on African American concerns. In that sense, outspoken black support for Farrakhan expresses, if nothing else, the determination of many African Americans not to be told who they can—and cannot—have as a spokesman (Kelleter, 2000, p. 11).

Viewed as a brave African American leader who has never feared of pronouncing any criticism on white supremacist and those in power—when other African American leaders are careful in stating their opinions—Louis Farrakhan, nonetheless, has no direct and real political power in as much as influencing the U.S. government to change or
make policies in favor of African Americans’ demands. He keeps on sounding the voice of anger and bitterness of the lives of many black underclass and sending messages to the public. But his messages (and many other African American leaders’ messages) in the largest mass gathering of thousands of African Americans in the Million Man March, first in 1995 and second in 2005, were viewed as spiritual and psychological messages for African Americans to reform themselves rather than as political messages to be listened by the government. The Million Man March’s messages were not heard by the government in the same way the messages of the 1963 Civil Rights Movement were heard such that it resulted in the abolition of segregation.

Concerning his political liaison with other African American leaders, Farrakhan’s anti-white supremacy, anti-Semitism, and racist images before the (white) public, although welcomed by his people, cause many African American politicians to distance themselves from him and the NOI. Those images maintain himself as an “outsider”—which surprisingly has served well as what Kelleter (2000) calls as publicity (pp. 11-12)—helped by the NOI’s image in mainline American politics. Kelleter concludes:

The more he is detested by the white bourgeoisie, the more credibility he can be sure of earning among a politically disillusioned black underclass—and the higher his credibility, the more legitimate his claim to being a vindicated leader of the ‘black community’. This simple equation, reinforced by the almost universal disdain for the Nation of Islam in America’s mainstream politics and popular culture, allows Farrakhan to base his claim to racial leadership on the implicit assumption that any
African American opposing him must either be a victim of white pressure or, worse, a conscious agent of white corporate interest (p. 12).

Despite his popularity, it is not easy for him to enter the political world. Using Darryl Pickney’s term, Farrakhan’s “outspoken truthfulness” (Pickney, 1995, p. 79, qtd. in Kelleter, 2000, p. 12) keeps him from entering the political world although he may not want to be a politician. His comments on the Jews in the case of Jesse Jackson’s slip, for instance, angered politicians to the degree that they specifically made a bill to denounce Farrakhan’s accounts (Marshall, 1996, 145).

Farrakhan had so upset the politicians in Washington that the Senate approved by a vote of 95-0, a Republican-sponsored amendment to an appropriations bill condemning Farrakhan’s statements and calling for written repudiation from the Democratic and the Republican national chairmen. Also, 13 House Democratic National Committee Chairman, Charles T. Manatt, asking that Jackson be prevented from addressing the party’s nomination convention, unless he repudiated Farrakhan (p. 145).

**Blacks and Jews Relationship**

and the Nation of Islam build upon the disparaging perceptions of the Jews that have existed and continue to exist in the African American community” (p. 8).

Not only Louis Farrakhan, his ex-National Spokesman and National Assistant, Khalid Muhammad (1948-2001), was fiery in his comments on the Jews that led to his shooting by a former minister of the NOI who disliked him. That former minister shot Khalid Muhammad after another NOI’s minister criticized Khalid Muhammad who he said no longer spoke for the NOI and for Farrakhan. As a result of Khalid Muhammad’s statements on the Jews in his speech at Keane College in November 1993, the American public (of mainly the Jews) attacked Muhammad. Muhammad was then fired from his national position by the NOI’s leader, Louis Farrakhan (Marshall, 1996, pp. 199-216).

From an African American’s view of the Jews as understood by Malcolm X, among other ethnicities the Jews were the most subjective in thinking and were usually hypersensitive due to a long enduring time of prejudices against them. Any remarks or comments on them could cause somebody to be called anti-Semite. Whether they realized or not, Malcolm X added, “all the bigotry and hatred focused upon the black man keeps off the Jews a lot of heat that would be on him otherwise” (Haley, 1992, p. 309).

Though the Jew was the non-African American who gave most support to the civil rights movement in the 1960s (Rockaway, 1995, pp. 1-2), it is said that the relationship between Blacks and Jews has never been on love and solidarity. Rather, Jonathan Kaufman (1988) in The Broken Alliance: the Turbulence Times between Blacks and Jews in America says that it is based on “politics and self interests” (qtd. in Rockaway, 1995, p. 2). From the early period as slaves, African Americans had been taught hatred against the Jews by their masters, white American Protestant, even before
their real encounters with the Jews. Rockaway (1995) claims that African Americans learnt how to hate the Jews from the story of white Christians about the Jews as the enemy who killed Jesus. Further, he adds, white Christians also told them about the Jewish negative stereotype as “money-grubbing materialists, dishonest and unscrupulous businessmen, and unproductive parasites living on the hard work of others” (pp. 3-4).

Having learned from the myth of Jews as the enemy, planted by white Christians since generation of early slaves and continued to their children, African Americans then encountered with the Jews directly in a disharmonic relationship when they began to inhibit areas formerly predominated by the Jews. In fact, Marshall (1996) notes, Louis Farrakhan’s Boston Temple used to be a Jewish synagogue (p. 48). When a lot of Jews sold their properties to African Americans, some remained and set up businesses with African Americans as the customers with whom they had direct contacts. Those Jews, then, became landlords who rented apartments to African Americans, merchants who sold stuff to them, and renters who lent them money (with interest). African Americans often complained about the Jews sold bad or poisonous stuff to the black community and neglected the apartments where African American tenants lived while they continued to earn money from them. Widespread is the antipathy among African Americans toward the Jews that it is not a surprise to hear Louis Farrakhan, or Khalid Muhammad during his life time, says that Jews are “sucking our blood in the black community” (Berman, 1994, pp. 1-2, New York Times, 16 Jan. 1994, qtd. in Rockaway, 1995, p. 1).

**Louis Farrakhan’s Contribution to the Black Community**

Despite all negative things about Louis Farrakhan that make him the enemy of the American public and invite disagreements and criticisms—even from African Americans
and Muslims who do not share the same thoughts, opinions, beliefs, and ideology with him and the NOI—we must admit that Louis Farrakhan has effectively rebuilt the NOI. It has become such an influential organization whose role in developing the black community, at least in terms of mental and psychological improvements, is worth mentioning. The NOI’s messages across African American religious preferences have repeatedly reminded African Americans of what the NOI calls mental resurrection—one important thing that must be done to cure all illnesses in the black community (e.g., drugs abuse, gun abuse, delinquency, gangsters’ crimes and warfare, domestic violence, and the absence of male figure leadership in fatherless female-headed families when black men either runaway from their responsibilities or are in jails).

**Louis Farrakhan and the Million Man March**

The Million Man March, first held in 1995 and recently in 2005, was a meeting of the largest masses of African Americans. It was Louis Farrakhan’s most successful debut on the black political stage which combined both “radical rhetoric, aimed at alienated black underclass, with conciliatory gestures toward the black political mainstream” (Kelleter, 2000, p. 29). Criticisms, not of the message but of the “messenger,” whether stated implicitly by African American leaders or explicitly by white leaders (e.g., former President Clinton and Senate majority leader Bob Dole), came from many political figures who did not think that a racial provocateur and an anti-Semite like Louis Farrakhan should have been the leader. Despite criticisms, Louis Farrakhan, as a major figure behind the march, colored the march with his messages of “spiritual and moral uplift”, economic independency, and “patriarchal family values” (Kelleter, 2000, pp. 35-53), and with the NOI’s socio-economic messages as the solution for the problems of
black underclass and black crime. Although militant in remarks, the NOI is conservative in values. It teaches African Americans the importance of family values and traditional values of American frontiers and pioneers such as self-reliant and hard work.
CHAPTER IV. THE NATION OF ISLAM AND ISLAM

Reinterpreting Islam and Questioning the Use of the Term Muslim

Muslim scholars admit that within the Muslim community there is no single understanding of what constitutes a Muslim, as asserted by Kambiz GhaneaBassiri (1997) in his book *Competing Visions of Islam in the United States* (p. 11). In his study he tries to “explore the way in which Muslims understand Islam in the United States and the role they see for themselves as adherents of this particular faith” (p. 11). He also points out that the understanding of Islam varies from country to country. The same is true with Muslims in the United States who are challenged to integrate their particular understandings of Islam into the new environment of America such that this country becomes, quoting from Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Adair T. Lummis (1987) in *Islamic Values in the United States*, “a kind of laboratory for creative Islamic institutions” (qtd. in GhaneaBassiri, 1997, p. 11). The absence of clergy within the Muslim world does not necessarily mean the absence of either acceptable or unacceptable views and leaders of Islam in any part of it. Diversity in people’s understanding of a religion is common because they have their own experiences, cultures, needs, objectives and levels of understanding of that religion (pp. 11-12).

With the same formula, African Americans who are the NOI’s members also have their own understanding and reinterpretation of Islam. Just as other Abrahamic religions which have schisms, there are also schisms in Islam (although there are no separate denominations in Islam as in Christianity). Like other religions, Islam is not practiced in exactly the same way among Muslims worldwide whose local customs and heritage may interact with the practices of Islam. Nonetheless, there are basic principles and teachings
followed by Muslims in which local customs and heritage cannot cross and, in this way, Islamic law becomes the force that unifies the differences in the community.

In the case of the NOI, Islam’s teachings have been adjusted in such a way to be combined with black nationalism. The purpose is to educate African Americans to live their lives well and to generate black pride so that they do not feel inferior. With the pride and sense of brotherhood, they have the power to struggle and achieve the national black agenda: a better life for African Americans in which they can enjoy freedom, equality, justice, and equal access and opportunity to climb the social ladder in every aspect of life.

Up to this day there is still confusion and questions about whether the NOI is Islam and whether its followers can be called Muslims. Some people argue that it is not Islam, but others argue that it is Islam only with a different interpretation based on the unique life circumstances of African Americans which is not experienced by other people or Muslims in other places. The NOI regards its religion as Islam and its followers as Muslims. Some say that the NOI’s members are Muslims because the term Muslim itself is a loose term with no fixed concord on what constitutes it, but some others say that they are not Muslims by the conventional standards of Islam. There is even a fatwa, “a ruling on a point of Islamic law that is given by a recognized authority” (“Fatwa”), against the NOI by an Islamic group for that reason.

As a point of reference, in helping to answer the two questions above, we need to go back again to the history of the NOI, the background of its foundation, its early development and, most importantly, the ideological transformation by Wallace Deen Muhammad—the son of Elijah Muhammad—who led the organization in the direction of the religion of Islam as conventionally practiced by the Muslim world. To help answer
the questions, it is important to understand why Warith Deen Mohammed did not continue his father’s teachings but instead dismantled and replaced them with the teachings of conventional Islam despite disagreement from some within the organization (see Chapter III for a discussion of his radical transformation).

In this chapter I try to show Islam as practiced conventionally and Islam as practiced by the NOI based on the NOI’s interpretation of the religion which was influenced by its specific circumstances. The aim is not to offer an opinion on whether or not the NOI is Islam and its members are Muslims, but to present information that will help clarify the public confusion concerning the NOI with respect to its affinity to Islam. What will be presented here is Islam based on its doctrines and practices as generally accepted and practiced conventionally by the Muslim world and Islam in the NOI’s beliefs and practices. Having discerned this information, it is hoped that readers can have a clearer understanding of the NOI and Islam to help find the answers to their questions.

**The Religion of Islam**

Islam, Muslims believe, is God’s religion which perfects all previous religions and was delivered through his last prophet and messenger, Prophet Muhammad ibn Abdullah (born in 570 A.D.). The Holly Qur’an as God’s final revelation was revealed to him through Gabriel (Jibril), an angel, containing guidance for worship and life matters.

Islam, as explained by GhaneaBassiri (1997), originally means submission (to God). In the process of helping Muslims understand God’s will and conform their lives with God’s will, God sends prophets chosen among the righteous persons through whom the will is made known to guide back people who deviate from God’s path. Many of the prophets in the Qur’an, beginning with Adam, are also mentioned in the Bible although
their stories are different. In contrast to Christianity’s teaching of the divinity of Jesus as the Son of God, for example, the Qur’an refutes such an idea by explicitly asserting the oneness of God who has no son: “He is God, the One. The self-sufficient Master Whom all creatures need. He has not begotten and has not been begotten. And none is equal to Him” (Qur’an 112.1-4). In the same way, the Qur’an refers to Judaism, “And Moses came to you with the clear signs, then you took to yourselves the Calf after him and you are evildoers” (Qur’an 2.92).

GhaneaBassiri (1997) also adds that Muslims, who consider Islam as the extension of Judaism and Christianity, believe that the Jewish Torah and the Christian Bible and the messages contained therein are corrupt, and therefore followers of these religions must go back to Islam (“the surrendering of oneself to God”) whose holy book, the Qur’an, is still in its original form without any reduction or addition. Thus, as GhaneaBassiri affirms, for Muslims “the Qur’an represents the original message of the prophets as ‘the creed of Abraham’ from which human had deviated” (pp. 1-2).

The Qur’an all over the world is read in Arabic and in translation to local languages containing exactly the same chapters, order, and words. Despite its various interpretations by different Muslim scholars, the Qur’an is like one book translated in many languages with exactly the same content. In addition, it is read by Muslims all over the world and said in their prayers in its original language, Arabic, even though they may need to learn the translation in their own native languages to understand the meaning.

**The Nation of Islam’s Perspective on Race**

The NOI has its own perspective on race based on the teaching of Elijah Muhammad asserting that the original man was black. It is interpreted by the NOI as
evidence of the superiority of black people over whites—in that blacks as the original people mean blacks as the first people on earth, the “god of the universe” (Vincent Muhammad, personal interview). Accordingly, it is understandable why the NOI always views blacks in comparison to whites. As pointed out by my thesis advisor, Dr. Lillian Ashcraft-Eason, in our conferences, the view of black as the original man is based on widely known scientific facts from anthropological findings and biological investigations of human fossils found in many parts of the world which prove that Africans were the first humans on earth (Dr. Lillian Ashcraft-Eason, Personal Communication).

Dr. Ashcraft-Eason’s assertion is supported by the findings of research relating to the origin of the human race, human evolution and development that have been reported by various scholars in the fields of anthropology and biology. In his article published by the American Institute of Biological Sciences entitled “Mitocondrial DNA Clarifies Human Evolution”, for instance, Max Ingman (2001), who at the time of writing this article was a doctoral candidate in medical genetics at Uppsala University, Sweden, suggested that the origin of modern humans who evolved around 170,000 years ago was in Africa, from where they migrated and replaced other hominids in other parts of the world as proven in recent studies of DNA in several populations. He and his colleagues (including researcher Professor Ulf Gyllensten) recently analyzed “the complete mitochondrial genomes of people selected from diverse geographical, racial, and linguistics background” (Ingman, 2001) and wrote “Mitocondrial Genome Variation and the Origin of Modern Humans” (Ingman et al, 2000, pp. 708-713) in the scientific journal Nature. He noted that based on the comparison of the DNA among living humans of various origins, molecular anthropologists in the past 15 years have created evolutionary trees. The uniqueness of
each human is due to polymorphism—differences in mutations of DNA passed from parents to children—on a phase of genetic composition (Ingman, 2001).

Though the analysis in polymorphism shows the closeness of a person’s relation with another or others, Ingman (2001) explained, there are still two opposing views on the development of archaic ancestors to modern humans. One is multi-regional evolution held by the minority—e.g., Australian scientists, including Dr. Alan Thorne of Australian National University, who challenged the Africa theory based on their research (“Fossil challenge”)—and the other is the recent African origin held by the majority—e.g., the Swedish Group made up of researchers from the University of Uppsala, Sweden, including Professor Ulf Gyllensten (Whitehouse, ed.). Those opposing views are resulted from different approaches used by molecular and physical anthropologists.

Despite the two opposing theories, Ingman pointed out that the two hypotheses basically agreed that “Homo erectus evolved in Africa and spread to the rest of the world around 1-2 million years ago” and that “it is regarding our more recent history where they disagree” (Ingman). Debates among scholars surrounding the origin of humans on earth still persist, but the majority have supported the Africa theory including the Human Origins Program at the Smithsonian Institution that gives the example of three of early human species from around 2 million years ago—Australopithecus africanus (STS 5), Homo habilis (OH 24), and Homo ergaster (KNM ER 3733)—which were found in Africa: South Africa, Tanzania, and Kenya, respectively (“Smithsonian”). The Smithsonian Institution also informs that the earliest fossil, Arpidithecus ramidus, is from around more than four million years ago (“Smithsonian”). It is similar to what is written in Archaeology Info quoting the research of Tim Whites and associates (1994) on the
specimens of *Ardipithecus ramidus* found in Africa, precisely in the West of the Awash River within the Afar Depressions, Aramis, Ethiopia (Whites *et al.*, 1994, pp. 306-312, cited in Archaeology Info).

With respect to the scientific fact that the first man on earth was black, the NOI’s view on race is reflected in its belief of the black man as the original man. However, not all the NOI’s members interpret the concept of the original man uniformly; at least not Wallace Deen Muhammad, the old NOI reformer and the son of Elijah Muhammad. In relation to the development of a man who is a physical person before a moral and spiritual person, Wallace Deen Muhammad takes a deeper understanding of Master Fard’s teaching of the black man as the original man as part of Master Fard’s plan to make African Americans know who they are and be proud of themselves and their blackness and their association with Africa that he found as something embarrassing for the Bilalian community he found in his time, the 1930s (Sernett, 1972, pp. 504-506). The Billalian community is a name that Wallace Deen Muhammad uses to call the black community; it is derived from the name of a Muslim black man, Billal, who called for prayers in the age of the Prophet Muhammad.

In his short essay “Self Government in the New World” in Sernett (1999)—originally cited from the *Bilalian News* no. 19, March 19, 1976 edition—Wallace Deen Muhammad offers careful reasoning and interpretation to the Bilalian community of Wallace Fard’s thoughtful plan to prepare African Americans for Islam. Wallace Fard, Wallace Deen Muhammad explains, wanted to bring life to the dead community of the so-called Negroes because he wanted freedom for them. That plan was conducted by, first, waking them up from the dead by improving their physical world. In order to
improve African Americans’ physical world, Fard wanted to help them get what they really wanted and needed materially. In the process he taught them to know who they were, before they could evolve into moral and conscious people. Fard believed that conscious people were those who would be ready to accept Islam as a voice that would unify African Americans as a family ruled under their own leadership—not under somebody else’s governance—in order to construct the structure that African Americans already had (Sernett, 1999, pp. 499-507).

Wallace Deen Muhammad does not just literally interpret Master Fard’s concept of the black man as the original man as the state of black superiority by virtue of having been the first on earth. In Wallace Deen Muhammad’s understanding of Master Fard and his plan, Master Fard set forth the black man as the original man, the first man, meaning that black people that Master Fard found in the 1930s and that Master Fard called the dead Negroes, was the man on earth ignorant of moral and spiritual values. Wallace Deen Muhammad thinks the original things are not always superior; in fact they are inferior but then become superior. The purpose of such a calling, Muhammad believes, is to make African Americans think of themselves as the best men, more natural and more human in feeling and conscience than whites at that time (Sernett, 1999, pp. 505-506).

**Islam’s View on Race**

Islam’s view on race is based on the passages about race in the Qur’an as well as Hadith of Prophet Muhammad containing his words and acts as described by his friends. In A Brief Illustrated Guide to Understanding Islam, I. A. Ibrahim (1997) cites what the Prophet Muhammad teaches about racial equality in Hadith narrated in Mosnad Ahmad.
O people! Your God is one and your forefather (Adam) is one. An Arab is not better than a non-Arab and a non-Arab is not better than an Arab, and a red (i.e. white tinged with red) person is not better than a black person and a black person is not better than a red person, except in piety (Ibrahim, 1997, p. 62).

In his book *The Religion of Islam and the Nation of Islam*, Mustafa El-Amin (1990), a member of the old NOI which was then reformed by Wallace Deen Muhammad, raises a specific question of which Muslim is meant when he explains differences between the NOI’s members and other Islamic followers. Seen from the perspective of “conventional” or “universal” Muslims of the so-called orthodox Islam, the calling NOI’s members Muslims is questionable in the sense that they do not share the same teachings and mostly do not perform the same practices as the conventional practice of Islam by other Muslims who follow the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad instead of Elijah Muhammad.

**The Qur’an in Islam and in the Nation of Islam**

Muslims believe that the Qur’an is the work of God (regardless of God’s color) and revealed to the Prophet Muhammad only during the Prophet’s life and was delivered only once and will last forever without any expiration and renewal. With respect to life in an Islamic way, Muslims of conventional Islam hold that they must follow God’s guidance in the Qur’an and the way of life exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad as reflected in a collection of his sayings and acts in *Hadith*. GhaneaBassiri (1997) points out that to follow the right path, Muslims must look at the Islamic law (*syari’a*) whose system of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is designed such that it is based primarily on the Qur’an
and Hadith. In order to accommodate the more complicated matters in life and the changing situation of the modern world, ulama (Islamic scholars) help to interpret Islamic rules in order to apply them to daily life (GhaneaBassiri, 1997, p. 3) so that Muslims can keep pace with the fast development of the world without deviating from Islam. As a religion highly stresses the importance of knowledge, though, ulama is not the only source of learning for Muslims. Despite the existence of ulama, Muslims are encouraged to learn about Islam by themselves, whether from the Qur’an, Hadith, Islamic books, or a religious teacher. This is especially because Islam is a non-hierarchical religion in which Muslim worships God directly without hierarchical authorities.

The NOI does not use the Qur’an as its primary reference. In fact, it uses the Bible much more often than the Qur’an. Louis Farrakhan, for instance, in his speeches quotes mostly from the Bible, instead of the Qur’an, though sometimes he uses reference from the Qur’an as well. Furthermore, the origin of the Qur’an based on the NOI’s teaching is different from what is taught in Islam. From the answer to the first question in the set of questions and answers passed out to new NOI’s members in their first meeting in “Nation of Islam Q and A” in Extreme Islam edited by Adam Parfrey (2001), it is revealed that the NOI believes that the Qur’an is created by the “Black Man of Asia” and renewed every so often (p. 230).

The Holy Koran or Bible is made by the original people, who is Allah, the Supreme Being or Being or Black Man of Asia. The Koran will expire in the year twenty-five thousands—nine thousands and eighty years from the date of this writing. The Nation of Islam is all wise and does everything right and exact. The Planet Earth, which is the home of Islam, is
approximately twenty-five thousand miles in circumference, so the wise man of the East (Black Man) makes history lasts twenty-five thousand years, he renews it for another twenty-five thousand years (p. 230).

In Elijah Muhammad’s *Message to the Blackman* (1965) it is said that the Qur’an was written by “the original nation on earth” (p. 108)—by black men (twenty-four scientists) who together wrote a holy book before another book would replace it after a certain period (pp. 91-97). El-Amin (1990) clarifies that the NOI neither teaches that the Qur’an is God’s final revelation nor that it was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (p. 10).

**The Concept of Man and Satan**

In Islam man is created by God, one God only, with a clear distinction between God and man: God is the one who creates man, God is independent and powerful, while man is dependent on God. Man is created in an equal position, no color is better than any other color; and everybody has the same potential for progress—they were all born to Islam, meaning everybody can be a Muslim because Islam is for all and not only for a particular group of people. Man is created with a basically good nature and with a tendency toward righteousness; it is his reason and will to choose to follow the right path of Islam or the wrong path. That’s why he is positioned by God as the leader (*khalifah*) on earth. He is the highest creature on earth (even created higher in nature than angels and forces of nature) and is provided with high intelligence, will, and reason (ability to think) which enable him to make decisions and choose the way to live.

On the contrary the NOI, El-Amin (1990) points out, believes that man has two different natures (good and bad) and created by two different Gods. The black man was self-created, while the white man was created by a black God who was a mad scientist
named Yacub who taught his creation to rule over the black man. The good man is the black man who was the first man on earth (from him came other races), the god of the universe, while the bad man is the white man. The NOI teaches that the black man is God and that “man can evolve to such a high mental level until he becomes God” (pp. 12-14).

Similar to the concept of God, the NOI teaches that satan is a man: the devil white race which is evil by nature. Islam does not teach that there is any race that is the devil. According to Islam, satan was originally a jinn. The jinn, according to the Qur’an, are created by God from “the smokeless flame of fire” (Qur’an 15.27). They have several types; one of which is satan, the disobedient jinn who always provokes humans (“Jinn”). When other angels followed God’s command to bow down to His creation—the human being—the disobedient jinn refused because he was arrogant. Then he became the “rejected” or satan. He swore to God that he would attack the humans. It is in Allah that the humans must seek refuge by reading the Qur’an and praying so that satan will not be able to attack them and reside in their hearts. The manifestation of satan’s mentality can dominate and be found in humans of any color or nationality who are capable of doing evil to other humans and to God’s creatures (El-Amin, 1990, pp. 27-28).

The Five Pillars

Despite differences in Muslims’ views on the extent to which Islamic values and behaviors should be enacted in their lives, there are two fundamental teachings held in conventional Islam: the five pillars and the six beliefs. The five pillars are Muslims’ basic duties, while the six beliefs (called the Article of Faith) are doctrines of belief that Muslims should have faith in. In their order the five pillars are: syahadat (faith
declaration), *shalat* (daily prayers), fasting, *zakat* (alm), and *hajj*. *Hajj* or pilgrimage is an exception in that it is only for Muslims who are financially and physically able.

**The First Pillar: Syahadat**

The first pillar, *syahadat*, is the proclamation of faith of a person who wants to be a Muslim. After learning and accepting the truth of Islam, by uttering the words of the *syahadat* before an Imam testifying to the oneness of God—Allah (meaning there is no other divinity but God)—and that Muhammad is God’s messenger, a person becomes a Muslim. The words of the *syahadat* are not mere words. The *syahadat* goes very deep into the hearts of all Muslims because pronouncing themselves as Muslims means submission to the only power that gives life and death (thus to the greatness of the only God) and readiness to follow the path of God by adhering to all Islamic rules, behaving in an Islamic way, and staying away from doing what is forbidden. It is a door through which one enters into the faith. To be a believer of Islam—to become a Muslim upon believing in Islam—a person should pronounce the *syahadat* wholeheartedly.

In the NOI, to be a believer one needs to sign a believer’s pledge. If one (non-NOI’s member) comes to a NOI’s mosque to attend its Sunday service, he might be asked to sign this pledge. The pledge says:

I, *(name)*, pledge to strive to love my brothers and sisters as I love myself.

I, *(name)*, pledge to strive to study to improve myself spiritually, mentally, physically and economically for the benefit of myself, my family and my people. I, *(name)*, pledge to strive to build schools, hospitals, housing, businesses; to buy farmland and enter into international trade and commerce for the good of myself, my family, and my people. I, *(name)*,
pledge to strive to give myself, my energy and whatever I can spare of my finance to accomplish the above said.

Initiation into Islam does not require signing a contract with a certain group of people because Islam is a universal religion which does not differentiate among races and nationalities. In his conversion to Islam, a convert may be asked to sign an Islamic certificate stating his becoming a Muslim, but nothing is mentioned about commitment to a certain group of people or race. In Islam Muslims are just Muslims without any color, race, nor country attachment to its (religious) status or preference.

**The Concept of God**

The strongest difference between the NOI and Islam is in the concept of God and messenger. When the *syahadat* as, borrowing GhaneaBassiri’s (1997) term, “the closest expression of a creed in Islam” (p. 6) is no longer compatible with the ideology of God and messenger in the NOI, the justification of using Islamic teachings becomes nullified. El-Amin (1990) informs that the NOI believes that the true and only God who creates everything the universe is the “Son of Man” (by the name of W.D. Fard) who is not a mysterious God. On the contrary, in Islam’s concept of God, God cannot be enclosed in anything. He is over all His creation and is not a physical being (El-Amin, 1990, pp. 4-6) detectable by human senses—God cannot be seen but can be felt in the hearts of those who are submissive—such that the Prophet Muhammad says in the *Hadith* of Gabriel, “to worship God as though you see God for if you do not see God, God sees you” (GhaneaBassiri, 1997, p. 6). The NOI does not believe in a mysterious God. It believes that God is manifested in a physical form that man can see. God is not, in Vincent Muhammad’s words, “a spirit or a spook”, He is “a man that works through man”
(Vincent Muhammad, personal interview). African Americans’ plight caused them to see W. D. Fard as God who saved them when the mysterious God did nothing (Parfrey, 2001, pp. 232-234). God in the NOI is not eternal.

He dies and his wisdom only lives ‘twenty-five thousands years’.

According to the Nation of Islam’s teachings, the world is in the 25,000 year cycle of Fard Muhammad’s wisdom. In fact, he is supposed to be the wisest and greatest God to have ever lived (El-Amin, 1990, p. 5).

It is a serious matter of what Dr. Devissi Muhammad called “interpretation of Islam” where the doctrinal differences between the NOI and Islam lie. He said, “Another thing about the Nation of Islam (which) is different from other interpretation of Islam is that Elijah Muhammad defines everything” (Devisi Muhammad, personal interview). If Islam places God as the Definer of everything, the NOI places its founder and leader as the authority who sets up what the followers hold; among others is the dichotomy of God as a living man in the NOI versus the unseen God in Islam. Furthermore, Dr. Devissi Muhammad claimed that Fard Muhammad was not a prophet but a supreme being, a mahdi, and was greater than the Prophet Muhammad. He was dispatched to teach black people, instead of teaching the rest of the people of the world, because, Dr. Devissi Muhammad affirmed, black people were in greater need of divine guidance than others.

**The Concept of God’s Messenger**

God’s last messenger in the NOI was Elijah Muhammad, not the Prophet Muhammad. Despite Louis Farrakhan’s recent effort to reposition Elijah Muhammad as a divine leader as he sometimes mentions in his speeches, he and the NOI’s ministers in general still mention Elijah Muhammad much more often than the Prophet Muhammad
(who in fact is very seldom mentioned as a figure exemplifying an Islamic way of life as is often done by Imams). So divine is Elijah Muhammad in the NOI that, as told by El-Amin (1990), after his death some NOI’s members believed that he was still alive (p. 8). For reference, check the Final Call October 1990 when Louis Farrakhan challenged the Muhammad family to dig Elijah Muhammad’s grave to prove his body was not there.

**The Second Pillar**

The second pillar, *shalat*, denotes to the obligatory prayers which must be performed five times daily in certain postures involving standing, sitting, bowing, and kneeling, in a certain manner and order (for those who are physically able; those who are physically unable can perform it by sitting or laying on bed but still in the same order). In Islam there are two kinds of *shalat*: obligatory and optional. The optional *shalat* is called *sunnah* (something which is good to do but failing to do it is not a sin). *Shalat* can be performed individually or in a group (which is better), either at home or in a mosque (*masjid*) or *mushalla* (a place of prayer which is smaller than a mosque). *Shalat* as an Islamic daily prayer must be distinguished from sermon where the congregation listens to a preacher’s lecture and from *dua* (prayer by saying words of prayer individually or in group), two things that the NOI often refers to when talking about prayers.

In general the NOI does not perform *shalat*, except a few members who do perform it like other Muslims, because *shalat* is not taught as a compulsory ritual in the NOI. But the NOI does *dua*. As a result, many of the NOI’s mosques do not have a place for *shalat* and ablution.

In addition, other than performing daily prayers, Muslims (males) also perform Friday prayer or *shalat Jumah* (*Jumah* means congregation) which is obligatory for male.
Unlike the five-time daily prayers, the Friday prayer must be done in a group and in a mosque under the leadership of an Imam. For Muslims who follow the conventions of Islam, Friday prayer is obligatory; but for the NOI it is not. Some NOI’s mosques do have Friday prayer service, but that service gives sermon and says dua instead of performing shalat after sermon as in mainstream Islam’s Friday prayer.

As a voice of the Islamic consensus, declared in its fatwa against the NOI, the Board of Ulema of the Italian Muslim Association proclaims that rejecting one of its clear syari’ah rules—e.g. without pressure a person says he does not need to fast during Ramadhan or does not consider prayer as obligatory or does not feel guilty saying that Friday prayer is not a must because people are busy during afternoon—is like rejecting all the syari’ah and the faith itself. The fatwa also says that a Muslim is not allowed to scrutinize whether another Muslim observes Islamic law, but when knowing that the person holds a wrong belief, he must correct and teach him based on the Qur’an and Hadith (Parfrey, 1997, p. 248). That was what Wallace Deen Muhammad tried to do with the NOI upon succeeding his father’s position as the NOI’s leader.

The Third Pillar

The third pillar in Islam is fasting during Ramadhan, the month in the Islamic calendar when God first bestowed the Qur’an on the Prophet Muhammad through Gabriel the angel. It is obligatory for Muslims who are already in the age of puberty and are healthy physically and mentally to fast during Ramadhan. The NOI under Elijah Muhammad first instructed members to fast in December, but then Louis Farrakhan taught fasting during the month of Ramadhan as other Muslims though it is an optional for the NOI’s members. Ramadhan in the conventional Islamic practice is not just a
dietary ritual in which they refrain from eating, drinking, and also abstaining from sex and any emotional outbursts from dawn to sunset. Instead, it is more about practicing self-restraint with regard to worldly desires while always reminding oneself of God who gives life and death and of the sufferings of the poor that in effect will hearten one to do more charity and good things for others while at the same time staying away from the behaviors and actions which are not recommended and forbidden in Islam. Muslims become more aware of their religiosity during *Ramadhan*.

Fasting during *Ramadhan* is the only obligatory fasting for Muslims. Besides that there are also some non-obligatory (*sunnah*) fasting such as fasting every Monday and Thursday and fasting for two consecutive days prior to the celebration of *Id al-Adha* (the feast of sacrifice at the culmination of *hajj*). Eating only twice a day everyday (not during *Ramadhan*) as practiced by the NOI is not a dietary rule of Islam. Presumably this strict dietary rule was enacted by Elijah Muhammad not to follow any Islamic rule but to discipline and promote the health of African Americans who had poor diet, eating and drinking habits which caused them to suffer from obesity and other diseases. Furthermore, the reason for fasting in the NOI as taught by Elijah Muhammad is different from that of Islam. As El-Amin (1990) informs, it is to object the Christian’s Christmas tradition (p. 31). In *How to Eat to Live* Elijah Muhammad (1972) writes:

> I prescribe for you the month of December to fast in—instead of the regular month that travels through the year, called Ramadhan by the Muslims; the month in which they say Muhammad received the Holy Qur’an. Why did I prescribe for you the month of December? It is because it was in this month that you used to worship a dead prophet by the name
of Jesus. And it was the month that you wasted your money and wealth to worship the 25th day of this month, December, as the Christians do (Muhammad, 1972, p. 48, qtd. in El-Amin, 1990, p.31).

**The Fourth Pillar**

The fourth pillar, *zakat* (literally, to purify), refers to the almsgiving for the needy that must be paid by Muslims (usually 2.5%) out of their savings and assets. As implied by its meaning, *zakat* purifies Muslims’ wealth by encouraging Muslims to use their wealth to help other people rather than to spend it on unnecessary material things and thus fosters social responsibility (GhaneaBassiri, 1997, p. 4). The NOI also always encourages its members to give what in Islam is called charity. In its Sunday meetings (and other meetings such as Savior’s Day and social gatherings of the organization), it always collects money from members.

At the end of *Ramadhan*, Muslims must pay *zakat* at the latest before performing *shalat Id Fitri*. *Id Fitri* celebrating the end of *Ramadhan* and *Id al-Adha* celebrating the day of sacrifice are the biggest days of religious observance in Islam, while in the NOI it is Savior’s Day commemorating the birth of Fard Muhammad, the NOI founder.

**The Fifth Pillar**

The fifth pillar is *hajj* which is for Muslims who are financially, physically, and mentally capable of making the pilgrimage to Mecca. It is a great source of happiness for Muslims all over the world. In the NOI, *hajj* is neither required nor stressed although it is also taught in the NOI as a part of the Five Pillars. The NOI’s leaders, except those who then changed their ideology into that of orthodox Islam like Malcolm X and Wallace D. Muhammad, mostly do not go to Mecca for the pilgrimage. Louis Farrakhan did perform
hajj with his family and a few important people from the NOI, but that was with a lot of doubts. Either the NOI’s ex-members or mainstream Muslims were doubtful of whether Louis Farrakhan really believed in hajj and Islam, and thus had changed his NOI’s beliefs, or whether he just tried to get sympathy from some Muslim countries which did not know exactly about the NOI’s teachings so that he could get financial support (‘‘Islam and Farrakhanism’’, ‘‘Letter to the Chicago Tribune’’, ‘‘How Louis Farrakhan’’, ‘‘Farra-con trip’’, ‘‘The ‘Nation of Islam’ is Not Islam’’). Louis Farrakhan’s ongoing speeches on the unchanged doctrines of the NOI after his pilgrimage have bothered the mainstream Muslims who are familiar with the NOI’s teachings.

**Islam’s Article of Faith and What the Nation of Islam Believes**

The part of the NOI most often criticized by mainstream Islam is its own belief system which deviates from the basic belief system of Islam. Although in Islam there is no set of doctrines upon which all Muslims have the same view, there is still basic system of faith which is agreed upon by all (called the Article of Faith), as pointed out by GhaneaBassiri (1997).

With respect to the issue of Muslim beliefs, it is important to note that Islam never developed a set of number of principles that all Muslims have agreed upon as the fundamental components of their faith (iman)….Based on the famous hadith of Gabriel and Qur’anic verses such as 2.1-4, 2.285, and 4.136, however, many have enumerated five essential principles: of the faith in Islam: belief in the oneness of God (Qur’an 112); belief in angels (Qur’an 2.177) and their role in communicating God’s message to human; belief in the prophets (Qur’an 3.84) and the sacred books (Qur’an 4.136)
that have been revealed to them; belief in the day of judgment (*Qur’an* 2.4); and belief in the sovereignty over all aspects of the world and human action (*Qur’an* 47.22) *(this is the same as belief in divine ordinance or pre-determination)* (GhaneaBassiri, 1997, p. 6, El-Amin, 1990, p. 16).

Sometimes the third belief as mentioned by GhaneaBassiri above, the belief in the prophets and the sacred books, is divided into two beliefs: belief in God’s prophets as the third faith and belief in those prophets’ scriptures as the fourth faith which accordingly will make up six beliefs as taught in some Muslim countries, instead of five beliefs, as mentioned by GhaneaBassiri, though the content is the same.

The six beliefs above are called the Article of Faith. They are fundamental principles of faith that must be believed by all Muslims. The Qur’an says, “O you who believe! believe in Allah and his Messenger and the scripture which He has sent to His Messenger and the scripture which He sent to those before (him). And who denies Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers and the Day of Judgment have gone for astray” (*Qur’an* 4.136).

The NOI has its own principle of belief called “What the Muslims Believe,” as we can read in any Final Call newspaper, even today, which is actually different from what (worldwide) Muslims believe. On page 39 of the Final Call, it is written:

1. We believe in the one God whose proper Name is Allah.

2. We believe in the Holy Qur’an and in the Scriptures of all the Prophets of God.
3. We believe in the truth of the Bible but we believe that it has been tampered with and must be reinterpreted so that mankind will not be snared by the falsehoods that have been added to it.

4. We believe in Allah’s Prophets and the Scriptures they brought to people.

5. We believe in the resurrection of the death—not in physical resurrection—but in mental resurrection. We believe that the so-called Negroes are most in need of mental resurrection; therefore, they will be resurrected first. Furthermore, we believe we are the people of God’s choice, as it has been written, that God would choose the rejected and the despised. We can find no other persons fitting this description in the last days more than the so-called Negroes in America. We believe in the resurrection of the righteous.

6. We believe in the judgment; we believe this first judgment will take place as God revealed, in America…

7. We believe this is the time in history for the separation of the so-called Negroes and the so-called white Americans. We believe the black man should be freed in name as well as in fact. By this we mean that he should be freed from the name imposed upon him by his former slave masters. Names that identified him as the slave master’s slave. We believe that if we are freed indeed, we should go in our own people’s name—the black people on earth.
8. We believe in justice for all, whether in God or not: we believe as others, that we are due equal justice as human beings. We believe in equality—as a nation of equals. We do not believe that we are equal with our slave masters in the status of freed “slaves”. We recognize and respect American citizens as independent peoples and we respect their laws which govern this nation.

9. We believe that the offer of integration is hypocritical and is made by those who are trying to deceive the black peoples into believing that their 400 years old enemies of freedom, justice and equality are, all of sudden, their friends. Furthermore, we believe that such deception is intended to prevent black people from realizing that the time in history has arrived for the separation from the whites of this nation. If the white people are truthful about the professed friendship toward the so-called Negro, the can prove it by dividing up America with their slaves. We do not believe that America will ever be able to furnish enough jobs for her own millions of unemployed, in addition to jobs for the 20,000,000 black people as well.

10. We believe that we who declare ourselves to be righteous Muslims should not participate in wars which take the lives of human. We do not believe this nation should force us to take part in such wars, for we have nothing to gain from it unless America agrees to give us the necessary territory wherein we may have something to fight for.
11. We believe our woman should be respected and protected as the woman of other nationalities are respected and protected.

12. We believe that Allah (God) appeared in the Person of Master W. Fard Muhammad, July, 1930; the long-awaited “Messiah” of the Christians and “Mahdi” of the Muslims. We believe further and lastly that Allah is God and besides Him there is no God and He will bring about a universal government of peace wherein we can live in peace together (“What Muslims” 39).

The NOI’s principle of belief contains what the Article of Faith says plus additional beliefs that the NOI has with respect to the rights of African Americans. Even if worldwide Muslims, who know about the history of African Americans, agree with the contents of articles in what the NOI believes (except the article of Fard Muhammad as God in person which contradicts the concept of tawhid—the oneness of God—in Islam), it is injudicious to put together what a religion (God) asks its adherents to believe with what an organization believes. Just like the NOI with its own objectives, desires, and needs, other Islamic organizations all over the world also have their own objectives, aspirations, and needs based on the circumstances, history and culture that form them. However, they do not mix the Article of Faith as the basic, fundamental system of belief in Islam with their organizational declaration. Even if they apply the Article of Faith to their objectives, it is used as a religious belief upon which the objectives are based.

**Judgment Day and Hereafter**

In the fifth Article of Faith (believe in the judgment day and hereafter), Islam teaches that there will be a day when God destroys the world and that all men will march
in rank and stand before God to receive a verdict regarding whether they are going to heaven or hell. God does not need anything to destroy what He creates; the Qur’an says:

And (remember) the Day We shall cause the mountains to pass away (like clouds of dust), and you will see the earth as a levelled plain, and we shall gather them all together so as to leave not one of them behind. And they will be set before your Lord in (lines as) rows, (and Allah will say): "Now indeed, you have come to Us as We created you the first time. Nay, but you thought that We had appointed no meeting for you (with Us)." And the Book (one's Record) will be placed (in the right hand for a believer in the Oneness of Allah, and in the left hand for a disbeliever in the Oneness of Allah), and you will see the Mujrimun (criminals, polytheists, sinners, etc.), fearful of that which is (recorded) therein. They will say: "Woe to us! What sort of Book is this that leaves neither a small thing nor a big thing, but has recorded it with numbers!" And they will find all that they did, placed before them, and your Lord treats no one with injustice (Qur’an 18.47-49).

El-Amin (1990) describes in his book of how the NOI teaches about judgment day very differently from Islam by incorporating a science-fiction scenario of a space ship. The NOI claims that on the judgment day that will first happen in America, there will be a big flying saucer (which by people today is often referred as a UFO) called Mother Plane or Mother Wheel. It will save black people from whites and bring them to space while smaller planes will drop bombs to destroy them (pp. 25-26). Notwithstanding its similarity to a Hollywood science-fiction film scenario, in 1987 the Nation of Islam’s
leader Louis Farrakhan confidently held a mass conference in front of the American media to announce and warn the public of the U.S. government’s plan (President George Bush Sr.’s meeting with the joint staff) to attack Libya which was only the preliminary stage of a bigger war against black people (Parfrey, 2001, pp. 238-246).

Conjoined with judgment day is the hereafter (life after death). According to Islam there will be a time when all men will be raised up from death and collected in a place of the afterlife. They will be judged based on what they do in the world. Acts, conduct, behaviors, words, intentions, all good and bad will be counted. Men will be put in heaven and/or hell based on that judgment.

The NOI does not believe in the life after (physical) death. What is called the hereafter in the NOI’s concept is mental resurrection which will take place in the world after the destruction of devil (whites) by God. Elijah Muhammad (1957) in The Supreme Wisdom claimed that there was no physical resurrection, what would happen was a mental of resurrection of the Black man who was made ignorant by the white man’s enslavement over him (qtd. in El-Amin, 1990, pp. 22-23).

My people have been deceived by the arch deceiver in regards to the Hereafter. They think the Hereafter is a life after spirits (spooks) up somewhere in the sky, while it is only on earth, and you won’t change to any spirit beings. The life in the hereafter is only a continuation of the present life. You will be flesh and blood. You won’t see spooks coming up out of graves to meet God (qtd. in El-Amin, 1990, p. 22).
As a consequence, the NOI does not teach that the hereafter is after man’s physical death, nor does it teach that it is not in the physical world that God will perform a total resurrection (spiritual as well as physical resurrection).

And man (the disbeliever) says: "When I am dead, shall I then be raised up alive?" (Qur’an 19.66).

And they say: "There is nothing but our life of this world, we die and we live and nothing destroys us except Ad-Dahr (the time)." And they have no knowledge of it, they only conjecture. And when Our Clear Verses are recited to them, their argument is no other than that they say: "Bring back our (dead) fathers, if you are truthful!" Say (to them): "Allah gives you life, then causes you to die, then He will assemble you on the Day of Resurrection about which there is no doubt. But most of mankind know not" (Qur’an 45.24-26).

**Fatwa against the Nation of Islam**

In a strict understanding of a Muslim, it is the use of the name Muslim which led to the fatwa of orthodox Islam against the NOI with regard to the question of whether or not the NOI and its followers are Muslims as per the most fundamental Islamic understanding of a Muslim. At the core of Islam is the concept of tawhid (the monotheistic faith in Allah) that must be believed by those who call themselves Muslims. As contained in the syahadat that must be pronounced by anyone who wants to be a Muslim, tawhid is a rigid concept in Islam upon which all Muslims in agreement. The NOI, though it takes some aspects of Islam in its teachings, deviates from Islam for having its own concept that contradicts the Islamic concept of tawhid. As mentioned in
Extreme Islam, edited by Adam Parfrey (2001), in its fatwa against the NOI (translated in English by Professor Abdul Hadi Palazzi, Secretary General of the Italian Muslim Association and Director of the Cultural Institute of the Italian Islamic Community), the Board of Ulema of the Italian Muslim Association (AMI) in 1998 declared the following:

Regarding the ‘Nation of Islam,’ their official doctrine is that Allah appeared in the form of a human being named Fard Muhammad, and that this ‘incarnation of God’ chose another man, called Elijah Muhammad, as his Prophet. This is a clear contradiction of the Monotheistic faith (Tawhid), and of the Qur’anic teaching according to which Muhammad (blessings and peace be upon him) is the Seal of the Prophets. That is enough to say that everyone who belongs to the ‘Nation of Islam’ is not, ipso facto, a Muslim, but an unbeliever. Muslim must declare this truth, and each one of them who keeps silent while listening to Mr. Farrakhan being called “a Muslim leader” is sinning. Since the matter concerns ‘faith and unbelief,’ it is not permitted to avoid judgment due to political or diplomatic considerations. Every marriage between a Muslim and a member of the “Nation of Islam” is null and void, and whoever, after becoming a member of this organization, wants to return to Islam, must repent and be re-converted. In case he was married, he must re-celebrate his wedding; in case he performed the Pilgrimage, he must perform it again. We pray to Allah to make all this clear to our brothers in Islam, and to help them never deviate from the doctrine that was revealed in the Holy
Qur’an and that is presently accepted by the Islamic Community. And we call upon Allah as a Witness of what we say (Parfrey, 2001, pp. 247-249).

The *fatwa* also said that the most common rule of Muslim Community regarding what constituted the “unbelief” was proven not by his actions but by the principles he believed, which could be generally proven by his speeches and writings (p. 247).

Many of Louis Farrakhan’s speeches revealing the beliefs, principles, and teachings of the NOI deviate significantly from the conventions of Islam. One can directly sense it when coming to the NOI’s Savior’s Day, the NOI’s biggest celebration to commemorate its “God in person” (“What the Muslims” 39), Fard Muhammad. El Amin (1990) mentions that Farrakhan refers to Fard Muhammad as “mahdi” (p. 6) in order to reduce the conflict between the NOI’s teachings regarding Fard Muhammad and the idea of the oneness of God as taught in Islam. Some people still doubt that Farrakhan is completely consistent with mainstream Islam. Upon his acknowledgment of the concept of God/messenger in Islam, he tried to slightly transform Elijah Muhammad’s position from God’s messenger into “divine leader, teacher and guide” (pp. 8-9).

All books about the NOI always mention Muslims, and a few times also Black Muslims, to address the NOI’s members. Nonetheless, the use of these terms is arguable, especially in the Muslim world which believes in and practices the teachings of universal Islam which are different from the teachings of Elijah Muhammad. Which is Muslim? Muslims in general neither feel that they believe in the same things as the NOI nor have the same thinking and practices as the NOI’s members. Unfortunately with the popularity of the NOI and its controversial leader, Louis Farrakhan, many Americans still view the NOI as Islam even though 9/11 encouraged people to know more about Islam.
CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION

Summary of Chapter I, II, and III:

The Nation of Islam as a Major African American Organization

As today’s most prominent African American organization asserting self-reliance and racial brotherhood, the NOI is not the first African American organization which encourages economic independence (self-help) and cooperation among blacks. Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which was founded in Jamaica in 1914 and continued into the 1920s, had the same ideology even with a much larger scope because his movement was aimed not only at African-Americans. The movement desired black people all over the world to return to Africa where they could “live under self-rule” (GhaneaBassiri, 1997, p. 137) because equality could never be achieved while living under a white colonialist government. Garvey’s “back to Africa” (ibid., p. 138) movement was not the first such movement, but was the most successful.

Other than UNIA there was also the Moorish Science Temple and the Ahmadiyya movement. Both were religious organizations with ideologies which were somewhat similar to the NOI and were also somewhat Islamic but with key differences which distinguished them from Islam, as concluded by GhaneaBassiri (1997) when talking about indigenous Muslim groups in the United States. “Concurrently, the indigenous Muslim population has gained more converts and formed new institutions with an understanding of Islam that has gone beyond the primary association of the faith with particular ancestral heritage” (p. 7).

Founded in 1913 by Noble Drew Ali, the Moorish Science Temple believed that African Americans were Moorish people of the Asiatic race and therefore rejected such
terms as black, colored, or Negro. This organization is often associated with the NOI due to their similarities and due to the history of the NOI’s founder, Fard Muhammad, who claimed to be the reincarnation of Noble Drew Ali. In connection with the Ahmadiyya movement, the NOI’s association with it is its use of the Maulana Muhammad Ali’s translation of and commentaries on the Qur’an. Maulana Muhammad Ali was a member of the Ahmadiyya movement and his version of the Qur’an was used by the NOI even though the NOI’s leader, Elijah Muhammad, denounced the Ahmadiyya movement’s founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, for claiming to be the promised messiah and *mahdi* when Elijah Muhammad believed Fard Muhammad to be the messiah and *mahdi*. All the three organizations described above which preceded the NOI were African American organizations that had the same view on the socio-economic and psychological needs of African Americans as the NOI (GhaneaBassiri, 1997, pp. 137-141).

With the long history of Africa as the origin of the first civilizations and cultures on earth, it was no wonder that African American nationalists, like Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X, and black nationalist organizations such as UNIA, the Black Panthers, and the NOI, looked back to Africa when they connected themselves to their history in their struggles. Unlike Marcus Garvey, who wanted the descendants of African peoples to go back to Africa, the NOI focuses its view and struggle inside the United States where it demands separate territory for black people within the U.S. territory as reparation for the unpaid labor of hundreds of years of enslavement (Kelleter, 2000, p. 75). Thus, they have different kinds of black separatism because the goal of the NOI is to have a separatist state within the United States as was affirmed by Elijah Muhammad who indicated that their destiny was in America. Despite that, both the NOI and the UNIA share Marcus
Garvey’s idea of “pan-African utopia” (Turner, R., 1997, p. 155, qtd. in Kelleter, 2000, p. 75) which holds the view that the African diaspora is a situation in which African Americans live beyond their original land (ibid., p. 75).

The term “diaspora”, coming from an ancient Greek word meaning a scattering or showing of seeds, can refer to “any people or ethnic population forced or induced to leave their traditional ethnic homelands; being dispersed throughout other parts of the world, and the ensuing developments in their dispersal and culture” (“Diaspora”). Africans, against their will, were forced to leave their homeland either as captives of war or as victims of abduction who were sold in the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

So bitter was the suffering of African Americans from slavery and post-slavery times that deep-seated resentment is at the heart of the NOI. This organization is unique in that it views white racism as an exact racial trait rather than as, in Kelleter’s (2000) terms, transformable cultural “contingencies” (p. 44). Kelleter suggests that the anti-white message delivered by the NOI is not political and serves to meet “the theological needs of the resentful bottom part of an underprivileged minority group” (p. 44). Hence, he asserts, an understanding of racism as something racial, rather than cultural, emerged from the realities of discrimination in the United States, which justifies Louis Farrakhan’s blaming white supremacy while at the same time embracing its traditional philosophy of self-reliant and hard work (building a lot of infrastructure such as businesses, factories, hospitals, and houses). For Louis Farrakhan, adopting middle-class white American values does not mean cooperation with them. Whether it is in the academic field, professional life or private life (emotional and sexual), the NOI’s ideology of separatism rules that African Americans’ success should be a result of joint cooperation with fellow
African Americans and never be with whites as implied in Farrakhan’s expression “don’t have to bash white people” (Kelleter, 2000, pp. 44-45).

Summary of Chapter IV: Is the Nation of Islam Islam?

From the detailed explanations in Chapter IV, together with the NOI’s history described in previous chapters, we see differences between the NOI and Islam in terms of teachings, doctrines, beliefs, and to a certain extent practices. This strengthens the main argument of this thesis that the NOI is more a social movement than a religious organization. We can also remember why and how Wallace Deen Muhammad radically transformed (see Chapter II) the NOI to conform to the accepted conventions of Islam. That was the most important turning point in the history of the NOI’s ideological growth following the decline of the organization left by Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad.

Whatever reinterpretation of Islam is adhered to by the NOI, that reinterpretation results in differences from conventional Islam that are critical and pertain to the most fundamental teachings and beliefs of the religion. The question of whether or not the NOI is Islam and whether its members are Muslims should be carefully considered based on valid information. It is important to carefully think of how far a reinterpretation of a religion is allowed to justify differences from the point of view of the religion itself. The fact is that it is common anywhere in the world that many followers of religions, whatever religions they are, have their own interpretations of their religions in terms of teachings and practices, especially because they live in different conditions and cultures that affect their religious view and practices. However, it does not necessarily mean that anybody can justify his beliefs, behaviors, and practices as what should be or what is correct or accepted in his religion without really knowing what the religion really teaches.
and asks its followers to do. Although the scriptures as the source of religious teachings can be interpreted differently by different followers of the same religion, there should be basic and fundamental tenets that unify followers under a religion. Otherwise there would be a lot of small cults instead of major religions in the world because of too many variances within each religion that can be totally different from one group to another group within what was originally the same religion.

Religion is not science. Science requires creativity and new ideas in its development. New parameters must constantly be introduced into experimental research in order to produce new results. That is how science gives birth to new theories, inventions, and technology. Religion, on the other hand, is something doctrinal in terms of teachings and practices. Although it allows different reinterpretations due to people’s life experiences, too many changes in its original and basic tenets will make that religion into something else. In Islam, despite the absence of agreement on its doctrines and practices, there are the Five Pillars and the Article of Faith as fundamental teachings that guide the so-called Muslims.

It is up to the readers to decide whether the NOI is Islam and whether its followers are Muslims. In this thesis, although it is painful to divide Islam into orthodox (mainstream) Islam and the NOI, and to similarly divide and classify the Muslims themselves for the purpose of clarification, I have tried to show what the NOI is and what Islam is. While claiming themselves as Muslims, the NOI’s members still hold the same teachings of Elijah Muhammad which are viewed by orthodox Muslims as in opposition to the accepted conventions of Islam or have never been taught in Islam.
The hope and possibility of conforming itself to Islam is still and is always open to the NOI. Recently, with the fast growth of Islam in the United States and the increase in interest in Islam due to major conflicts in the world involving the West and the Muslim world, more scholars in the NOI have started to learn about Islam. One day another reformation (like what Wallace Deen Muhammad did in the past) to get back to the teachings of Islam may happen as more and more people in the NOI are willing to learn about their religion (Islam), to open their religious consciousness, and to follow their religion—Islam—if it is true that for them Islam is really the religion that they believe and not just a mere psychological need as a people who lives in the periphery of American society. Nevertheless, until they are wiling to remove the comforting shield that the NOI’s doctrines give them as a counterattack to the American racism and inequality, it is difficult for the religious reformation to take place thoroughly.

**Summary of the Research Study**

*The Importance of the Research Study*

Based on an understanding of the black national agenda to improve African Americans’ lives through the means of economic, educational, legal, and social empowerment as clearly stated by the NOI and reflected in its activities and teachings which combine the teachings of Islam (that have been modified based on the conditions of African Americans) as taught by Elijah Muhammad and black nationalism, I wanted, in this study, to point out the facts of relating to the NOI as a social movement as well as a religious organization and do an investigation on it to be able to compare it with Islam.

In order to reach this conclusion, it is imperative not only to compare the NOI with Islam in terms of their differences and how far it has deviated from mainstream
Islam, but also to reveal the status of the NOI today. This is very important for the NOI itself and more importantly for other Muslims who do not belong to it, in order to, first, correct American people’s perception about the NOI as a racist organization (if it has changed) and, second, to create mutual understanding and brotherhood between the NOI and other Muslims in the U.S. and in other countries. That way, it is hoped that they can cooperate in activities that may help clear Islam’s image as a religion that loves peace and does not suggest hatred, racism, or even terrorism as is often attributed to Islam.

**Methodology**

After contacting some people from the NOI via telephone and email, visits and interviews were conducted. The results of this investigation were integrated with information from the existing literature relating to the NOI in this thesis.

**Findings**

Based on my observations and interviews, together with literature review which I conducted prior to writing this thesis, I have arrived at two major conclusions. First, the NOI as an African American organization bearing the name of Islam is not a mere religious organization as discussed in Chapters I, II, and III. Second, the NOI has been and is still different from Islam as discussed in Chapter IV.

The NOI is a socio-political organization, the goal of which is to empower, generate pride and self-assurance, and elevate African Americans from their disadvantages and sufferings as the most unfortunate minority group in the United States. It is not a mere religious organization.

When viewed as a religious organization, the NOI *does* teach some aspects of Islam, but many of its basic teachings are against or never been taught in Islam. Though it
keeps on changing from time to time and has had some factions within the organization
due to ideological differences, the NOI today still survives as a national African
American organization which still espouses the teachings of Elijah Muhammad which are
against the accepted conventions of the religion of Islam while at the same time trying to
gradually examine the teachings of Islam.

Issues for Future Study

There are several pertinent issues that have not been addressed in this thesis. The
perceptions of American (non-African American) Muslims of the NOI and vice versa
merit further examination in future research. Despite its shortcomings, this research on
the NOI will encourage other writers to do more up-to-date research about the NOI based
on its latest developments because the situation is constantly changing. Hopefully, this
will lead to a better understanding of the NOI by the American public, both white and
black, and by the rest of the Muslim world which disagrees with the NOI’s teachings and
beliefs to reduce racial tension and religious misunderstanding.
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APPENDIX A. CONSENT LETTER

You are invited to be in a research on the Nation of Islam, the differences and similarities of the Nation of Islam and Islam and the status of the Nation of Islam today. As a part of my work on the Master Program in the Department of American Culture Studies, Bowling Green State University, I am conducting a research of the Nation of Islam. This study is being conducted for a class project as well as my Master’s thesis. The purpose of this study is to find the differences and similarities of the Nation of Islam and Islam and to investigate the status of the Nation of Islam today as there is a tendency that it may intend to purify itself by getting back to the traditional Islam recently.

This study will request you, as a knowledgeable member of the Nation of Islam, to answer questions in an interview. I estimate that your initial participation will take approximately two hours of answering the interview questions. The anticipated risk to you is no greater than those normally encountered in daily life.

This study may benefit your organization (the Nation of Islam) in order not to be perceived by the American society and the world as a racist organization anymore and to enhance mutual understanding between the Nation of Islam and other Muslims in the United States who do not belong to the Nation of Islam, as well as Muslims all over the world, so that they can work together in beneficial activities for the betterment of the human race regardless of skin color and religion.

Information you provide will remain confidential and your identity will not be revealed in any published results unless you specifically request identification. Confidentiality will be protected by storing data in locked filing cabinet and password protected database. I plan to quote your answers directly or reveal your identity in any
way in case you do not want your identity being made known or if you want to make yourself anonymous.

If you have any questions or comments about this study, you can contact me, Dwi Hesti Yuliani, at (419)353-0159, dyulian@bgnet.bgsu.edu or Dr. Lillian Ashcraft-Eason, my project advisor, at (419)372-8120, lashcra@bgnet.bgsu.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University, (419)372-7716 (hsrb@bgnet.bgsu.edu) if any problems or concerns arise during the course of the study.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you can refrain from answering any of all questions without penalty or explanation. By completing and returning this form, you are indicating your consent to participate in this project.

Signature of the participant: ________________

Date: ________________
APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

A. About the Nation of Islam:

1. What is the Nation of Islam?

2. Who is the leader of the Nation of Islam?

3. Can you tell the history of the Nation of Islam’s development in your local area?

4. What are the activities of the Nation of Islam here in your local area?

5. What are the main teachings/beliefs/doctrines of the Nation of Islam?

B. Membership

6. What encouraged you to join the Nation of Islam?

7. What are the requirements to be a member of the Nation of Islam?

8. Are all members of the Nation of Islam blacks? Can whites be members? What about other non-blacks?

9. How many members does the Nation of Islam have throughout the United States? How many in this area?

C. The teachings of the Nation of Islam:

10. What / Who is God according to the belief of the Nation of Islam? In the second phase of Fard’s doctrine of God, with the encouragement of Elijah Muhammad, Fard shifted his view from “God is Allah” to he himself is “Allah in the Flesh” (Tsoukalas, 2001, p. 41). Does the Nation of Islam still hold the view?

11. Does the Nation of Islam today still believe in the teaching of the NOI’s founder (W.D. Fard) about race mentioning that “the white race is created by an evil scientist named Yakub and is a hybrid race derived from the original black man and therefore inferior to blacks” (Tsoukalas, 2001, p. 39)?
12. Do you think that the Nation of Islam is a racist organization as many books wrote and as the media portrayed to be?

D. Reformation in the Nation of Islam

13. Is the Nation of Islam today (2005), under the leadership of Louis Farrakhan, the same Nation of Islam as was in the past with some of its teachings against Islam?

14. Or, has it reformed today and got back to traditional Islam?

E. Hierarchy in the Nation of Islam

15. Is there any hierarchy within the Nation of Islam? If yes, how are those positions different and what are they?

16. What is minister in the Nation of Islam? Does it mean the same thing as minister in Christianity and imam for Muslims? What are the duties / responsibilities of a minister?

17. What is the importance of Louis Farrakhan for your organization and for you yourself as its member?

F. Identity

18. How would a member of the Nation of Islam prefer to call himself? African-American, black, Negro, American or African? What’s the difference?

19. Is it difficult to be a Muslim in the United States?

20. Which is more difficult, to be black or to be Muslim?

G. The Nation of Islam and America

21. How has or in what way has the Nation of Islam made contribution to American society and America as a nation?
22. What are the roles of the Nation of Islam in improving the life of African-Americans in general (not only black Muslims)?

23. How does the Nation of Islam address social issues in your environment? How does the Nation of Islam deal with economic problems of black people?

H. Being Muslim in American society

24. How does the Nation of Islam teach its members to take care of their families and have them maintain Islamic way of life despite their living in an American society where culture, custom, and rules are different?

25. In your daily life, how would you act as an American as well as a Muslim? How would you live your life as an American Muslim?

I. Race issue

26. Are all races, according to the Nation of Islam, equal or unequal (unequal here means there are levels of races in which one race is better than the other(s))? Does the NOI still hold the belief that white man is devil?

27. How does the Nation of Islam view race relationship in the United States from time to time?

J. The Nation of Islam and Islam

28. What are the differences and similarities between the NOI and Islam?

29. How do you, as a member of the Nation of Islam, see other Muslims all over the world who do not belong to the Nation of Islam and who maybe also disagree with some teachings and beliefs of the Nation of Islam?

30. Can any other Muslims from any races who do not belong to the Nation of Islam pray in the NOI’s mosque?
APPENDIX C. PHOTOGRAPHS


Photo 2. Muhammad Mosque of the NOI in Savannah, Georgia.
Photo 3. The bookstore at the front part of the NOI’s mosque in Savannah, Georgia.

Photo 4. The neighborhood of the NOI’s mosque in Savannah, Georgia.