THE RISE OF ISLAM IN BLACK PHILADELPHIA:
THE NATION OF ISLAM'S ROLE IN REVIVING AN ALTERNATIVE
RELIGIOUS CONCEPT WITHIN AN URBANIZED BLACK POPULATION,
1967-1976

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master Degree of Arts in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Damani Keita Davis, B.A.

*****

The Ohio State University
2001

Master's Examination Committee:
Dr. Stephanie Shaw, Adviser
Dr. Ahmed Sikainga
Dr. Leslie Alexander

Approved by

Stephanie Shaw
Adviser

Department of History
ABSTRACT

This study examines the public activities of the Nation of Islam in Philadelphia during the late 1960s and mid-1970s, documenting the sect's growth and evolution from a Black-religio-nationalistic sect, to a Sunni Islamic religious movement. An analysis of contemporary newspaper and magazine articles during that period shows that the Nation of Islam in Philadelphia effectively capitalized on an increased popularity and support of Black nationalistic ideology within much of the local Black populace, particularly during the ascendancy of the Black Power movement. Using various forms of available Black media, the Nation of Islam propagandized and promoted its program to a highly receptive and increasingly sympathetic Black audience. By the mid-1970s, the Nation of Islam's efforts resulted in the sect's increased growth and influence in Philadelphia's Black community. The Nation of Islam's successful proselytizing efforts during the 1970s established the base for Philadelphia's current, sizeable, African-American Islamic population.

The study analyzes information from various secondary sources, primarily from the social sciences, in order to establish the social, economic, and political context of the period examined. Significant developments such as the postwar migration of Blacks from the South, the expansion of Philadelphia's Black population, the local and national process of deindustrialization, are documented in order to analyze the effects on local
social conditions. The political and cultural context of Black Philadelphia is examined by a historical overview and analysis of early forms of Black nationalism and alternative religious movements, the ascendancy of the local civil rights movement during the post-World War II era, and the rise of Black Power ideology during the 1960s. Within the context of these larger developments, the activities of the Nation of Islam are analyzed, documenting a significant instance of socio-cultural and religious transformation within an urbanized, Black population.
Dedicated to my beloved parents,

Edwin A. Davis, Jr. and Doris M. Lyons
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I must give thanks and praise to the Most High, the All in All, the Infinite Spirit that is the power and strength of my life, my light and my salvation. I extend love to my parents, Edwin A. Davis Jr. and Doris M. Lyons, and thank them for the foundation of love that they provided me all of my life. I must thank my adviser Stephanie Shaw for expecting the best out of me, and not settling for less. I extend extreme gratitude to Dr. Leslie Alexander and thank her for all of her support and encouragement. I also extend sincere appreciation to Dr. Ahmad Sikainga.

A special thanks and expression of gratitude must also be extended to three individuals, without whom I would not have accomplished this task. To Mrs. Consuella Wilder, no words can express how grateful I am to you for being there for me through some of the most difficult periods of my life. Thank you, sincerely. And to those two beautiful, young Black women who have demonstrated true friendship unto me—a special thanks is extended to Zareefa Abdul-Adl and Ziyadah Shamsid-Deen.
VITA

October 6, 1971.......................... Born—Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

1998..............................B.A. History, Coppin State College, Baltimore, Maryland

1998—present..............................Graduate Teaching Associate, The Ohio State University

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: History
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The Roots and Development of Religious Alternatives</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Ascendancy of the Nation of Islam in Philadelphia: From Integrationism to Nationalism</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Charges and Countercharges: The Internal Struggles of a Growing Movement</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. From Black Nationalism to Sunni Islam</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

"Religion has, indeed, been a determinative dynamic in the unfolding life of the African-American community in the United States. This does not suggest an unqualified assent to the common assertion that African Americans are a 'religious people.' Rather, it is a recognition of the fact that it is impossible to achieve an adequate understanding of this people's, or any people's, historical identity apart from a serious consideration of religion as both a motive force and an organizing framework for their efforts toward a secure, equitable inclusion in the human community."

--Larry G. Murphy

This thesis looks at the development of an alternative religious tradition among African Americans in Philadelphia in the late-twentieth century. While the majority of African Americans were and remain members of various Christian denominations, Islam in America which dates back to the advent of African Slavery, took root and flourished during the twentieth century, especially during and after the 1960s. The massive processes of migration and urban dislocation, along with the resulting segregation and discrimination experienced by blacks, influenced this phenomenon. It was also influenced by the historical traditions of self-help and social/racial consciousness, and was fueled by highly nationalistic rhetoric and ideology. This twentieth-century evolution of African-American Islam was in some ways similar to the development of other religious movement in urban America. But the expansion of Islam was unique in that it was the first, major departure from the traditional Judeo-Christian worldview that had defined,
not only the larger American culture, but the distinct form of Black Christianity that had shaped much of African-American culture.

Documenting the evolution of various religious forms is an excellent way to trace larger social and cultural transitions.\(^1\) Anthropologists Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer state that in “addition to exemplifying the variety and richness of the African-American experience, religion is a significant dimension of African-American culture because of what it can tell us about the position and condition of Black people in the United States.”\(^2\) Scholars C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya concur with this notion, stating that, “a good way to understand a people is to study their religion, for religion is addressed to that most sacred schedule of values around which the expression and the meaning of life tends to coalesce.”\(^3\)

An examination of the growth of Islam among African Americans in the twentieth century represents an important project. Since the 1960s, African Americans converted to Islam at rates that have increased each decade. African Americans currently represent the single largest group of Islamic believers in the United States ranging somewhere between 1.5 and 4.5 million persons.\(^4\) An important aspect of this growth reflects a significant shift from the predominantly Christian forms of religious expression that shaped much of Black culture throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The need for scholars to

---


investigate Islam as both a social movement and an alternative religious tradition is reinforced, further, by demographic estimates, which show that Islam has now replaced Judaism as the second largest religious tradition in the United States. In a country that has traditionally defined itself as “Judeo-Christian,” C. Eric Lincoln noted that “beyond mere statistics, the presence of a prominently visible, orthodox Muslim community in the United States would have political, social, and economic implications, which might, in time, reverberate far beyond the realm of spirit.” This is especially evident when considering that Islam is also the world’s fastest growing religion and is soon expected to surpass Christianity in its total number of adherents worldwide. These demographic developments should result in an increased influence of Islam on America’s domestic and foreign policy.  

Despite all this, there exists very little published research addressing the history of Islam’s presence among African Americans and Americans in general. Commenting on this lack of research, C. Eric Lincoln states, “Amazingly, Islam, which today claims nearly a billion adherents, has never attracted significant scholarly investigation in America.” Other scholars also note the general dearth and deficiency of scholarly material addressing various Islamic manifestations and their relation to the larger history of Blacks in America. Theologian Marsha S. Haney submits that “Islam has had a long and complex history in the United States and it is this history that needs to be revisited and re-ordered in order to

---


understand how it has functioned in the African-American community.\textsuperscript{7} Historian Claude A. Clegg III observed that the “lack of interest in the Nation of Islam on the part of academia, and the resultant dearth of published studies on the subject” resulted in the sundry forms of distortion and misinformation that he confronted while writing his biography of Elijah Muhammad.\textsuperscript{8} Only in the past decade have scholars such as Yvonne Haddad, Aminah Beverly McCloud, Ernest Allen, Jr., Yusuf Nuruddin, and others, produced works that are beginning to fill this void, correct the information, and supplement earlier works produced by scholars such as C. Eric Lincoln.\textsuperscript{9}

Islamic religious expression is not new to Blacks in America; Islam was the primary belief system of a significant portion of enslaved Africans. C. Eric Lincoln, who during his latter years was researching the early period of Islam among Blacks in America, noted that up to 20 percent of the “African slaves imported to the United States during the slave era were Muslims.”

Acknowledging the difficulty of adequately documenting this claim—especially since Islam and indigenous African religions were suppressed, and slaves had few formal means of preserving or documenting religious inclinations—Lincoln

contended that "occasional references to "Muhammedan" slaves do persist in the
literature of the period, revealing what may well be the tip of the very large
Islamic iceberg yet to be fully discovered and reported." Scholars Allan D. Austin
and Michael A. Gomez have both produced works that explore this early period
more closely and examine the various forms of evidence alluded to by Lincoln.
And though neither scholar claims that the religion was ever "numerically
extensive," their research does show that pre-twentieth-century Islam "was a
distinctive presence" among enslaved Africans in North America.¹⁰

Indeed, Albert J. Raboteau, in a pioneering work on the slave religion,
argues that Black conversion to Christianity was actually a long process that
spanned nearly two hundred and fifty years. In the 1700s, many whites had been
reluctant to convert enslaved Blacks, and the process of Christian conversion was
not uniform across regions but proceeded at disparate rates in different parts of
the country. It was not until the early and mid-1800s that the majority of Blacks
had finally accepted Christianity, made it their own, and formed a "community"
and culture that was based on this "invisible institution."¹¹ The culture that was
formed from this institution is that on which the twentieth-century Black
church—and Black cultural expression in general—was based. Therefore, the
advent of Black Islam, along with Black Judaism and other alternatives to
Christianity that rose during the early twentieth century, was a departure from the

1994), 255; Allan D. Austin, African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook (New York:
Garland, 1984); Michael A. Gomez, Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of
African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South (Chapel Hill: University of North
dominant religious tradition that had been established by the 1800s after a two-
hundred year process of evolution.

The general consensus among scholars is that the growth of Islam in the
Black community during the twentieth century has been largely an urban
phenomenon. Explaining this phenomenon, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence
Mamiya posit that the “social processes of migration, urbanization, and
differentiation” led to a diminishing of aspects of the Black church’s centrality
and dominance in the Black community. This process of differentiation in the
Black community began in the late nineteenth century and accelerated with the
urban migrations of the twentieth century after World War I. It revealed forms of
“increasing class differentiation, the development of secular institutions, and the
rise of competing black religious groups.” By 1970, when the major migrations
of African Americans from rural areas to cities and from the South to the North
and West had come to an end, the Black community was much more dispersed
geographically and more variegated, with Blacks increasingly having more
diverse lifestyles and socio-cultural distinctions. It is within the context of this
larger historical and social trend of African-American urbanization that Islam’s
rise in the Black community is examined in this study. This study focuses
especially on the activities of the Nation of Islam because of that movement’s
crucial role in popularizing the concept of Islam among African Americans. It is
not the aim of this study to provide a detailed “religious” history that examines all
of the intricate details of doctrine and religious argument; rather, the primary

11 Albert J. Raboteau, Slave Religion: The “Invisible institution” in the Antebellum South (New
objective is to document an important but neglected socio-cultural development in the history of African-American urbanization.\textsuperscript{12}

This research focuses on the city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. As the site of one of the oldest and most historically influential Black communities in the United States, Philadelphia is crucial to any discussion concerning the history of African-American urbanization. As early as the 1700s, Black activists in Philadelphia, such as Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, had organized members of the Black community for group action through organizations such as the Free African Society. The organizing of the Free African Society eventually gave birth to the first Black church in the North, the First African Church of St. Thomas, which was founded in 1794 by Absalom Jones; and in 1796, Richard Allen founded Bethel, the first African Methodist Episcopal Church in the nation. From these churches, Blacks in Philadelphia established an early tradition of urban activism based on autonomous Christian institutions that continued to serve as centers of the community well into the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{13}

By the end of the twentieth-century, Philadelphia had become the home to one of the largest African-American Muslim populations in the United States. In a 1993 interview, Scholar Ihsan Bagby of the Islamic Institute near Los Angeles remarked that Philadelphia was exceptional because of the large percentage—over two-thirds—of the city’s Muslims that were African American as opposed to

\textsuperscript{12} Raboteau, 149, 209-10; Lincoln and Mamiya, 2-11.

immigrants from Islamic nations. The Black population of Philadelphia had the highest proportion of Muslims of all major cities in the United States, and at that time, only New York City had a higher gross number of African-American Muslims.14 Commenting on the rate of the religion's growth among Blacks in Philadelphia, Bagby stated that it was common for "five people a week to accept Islam in each of the city's 10 predominantly African-American mosques."15

By the 1990s, the presence of Islamic cultural manifestations had become prevalent enough to produce a perception that, in many of Philadelphia's predominantly Black neighborhoods, "Muslims—and the Islamic culture—[were] part of the family, and part of the fabric of everyday life."16 A 1995 Newsweek article focussing on the growth of Islam in Philadelphia estimated that there were over 60,000 Blacks in Philadelphia who were orthodox Muslims; up from 40,000 only five years earlier.17 Other estimates suggested that there were also large numbers of African-American Muslims in the surrounding metropolitan area, including southern New Jersey. High rates of African American conversion to Islam was also evident in other urban centers such as New York, Newark, Detroit, Chicago, and throughout the general African-American population.

---

14 According to some estimates, Newark, New Jersey possibly has the highest proportion of Muslims within its Black population, but of major cities with populations over 500,000, Philadelphia has the highest proportion of Muslims within its Black populace. See, "Mohammed Speaks on Philadelphia in Kernersville, NC, July 31," Muslim Journal, 17 September 1999.
17 Steven Waidman, "Battling for Souls," Newsweek, 30 October 1995, 46; The latest estimates from 1999 submit that Philadelphia's African-American Muslim population was over 75,000.
Despite the fact that this conversion appears to be an urban phenomenon, most research addressing the topic of Islam’s expansion in America has concentrated primarily on national trends rather than specific locales.

The extant literature examining the twentieth-century emergence of African-American Islam is multi-disciplinary and approaches the topic from a variety of perspectives. The earlier works tend to concentrate on the genesis and inner workings of the Nation of Islam and are concerned primarily with its implications for American race relations and the Civil Rights movement. The more recent works are concerned less with American race relations and concentrate more on questions concerning Islam’s place in the general cultural and religious history of the African-American community, the shift from “proto-Islam” to orthodox Sunni Islam, and the relations between African-American Muslim communities and immigrant Muslim communities. For the most part, however, the works from both periods are united in their effort to analyze this religious phenomenon in the context of the Black historical experience in a racist society.


---

18 The term “proto-Islam” or “proto-Islamic” is a term coined by C. Eric Lincoln that refers to sects that incorporated some forms of Islamic terminology, belief or practice within their rituals, but deviate in other ways from some of the fundamental tenets of orthodox Islamic practice and theology. Therefore these sects are considered “non-orthodox” and are not always included or considered within the fold of the global Islamic movement. In the American context, however, these groups served the function of establishing an awareness of Islam in communities that previously had no widespread knowledge of the religion. Some of the African-American sects that are considered proto-Islamic are the Moorish Science Temple, the Nation of Islam, and the Ahmadiyya Movement. See, C. Eric Lincoln, “The Muslim Mission in the Context of American Social History,” in *African American Religious Studies: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed. Gayraud S. Wilmore (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 340-356.
Essien-Udom, set the scholarly foundation for all subsequent works investigating African-American Islam in general and the Nation of Islam in particular. Both studies were published at the height of the Civil Rights movement during the early 1960s, and thus, reflect the concerns with racial relations that prevailed in the political discourse of that time. In *The Black Muslims in America*, C. Eric Lincoln categorized the Nation of Islam as a mass social movement and regarded it as an alternative segment of the larger African-American protest movement that was occurring during that period.\(^\text{19}\) Contrasting the Nation of Islam with other protest organizations such as the Urban League, the NAACP, CORE, SCLC, and SNCC, Lincoln’s primary goal was to identify the societal factors that propelled this group of African Americans to adopt a separatist ideology. To facilitate this objective, Lincoln’s study analyzed the social circumstances out of which the Nation of Islam was produced, the character of its membership, and the nature of its goals. Lincoln concluded that those persons who joined the Nation of Islam represented a segment of the African-American community who responded to American racism by rejecting the existing society and striving to create a separate, “meaningful existence” based on principles and values that promoted Black self-determination, autonomy, and socio-economic empowerment.\(^\text{20}\)

Essien-Udom’s, *Black Nationalism*, proceeded essentially from the same conceptual framework that Lincoln had established. Essien-Udom’s work, however, placed more emphasis on the Nation of Islam’s role in identity

---


\(^\text{20}\) Ibid.,
formation than on the theme of social protest. Essien-Udom considered the Nation of Islam’s conception of a new, type of “Black” identity of the individual self, group, nation, religion, and God as foundational to the movement’s larger economic and moral program from which their pragmatic interests were advanced. Essien-Udom suggested that the Nation of Islam’s unique, Black nationalist eschatology was a remedy to the “psychological trauma and personality disturbances” that were the result of African American’s social history. For Essien-Udom, this Black religio-nationalist worldview and “manifesto of identity,” exemplified in the Nation of Islam’s program, represented an instance of “the Negroes’ conscious, though slow, awakening to their heritage of abuse and degradation, and especially, to their possible destiny as human beings. It also underscored the reality of African-Americans’ “ambivalence toward assimilation, i.e., the loss of their identity, cultural traits, and history.”

Most scholarly studies on the Nation of Islam that immediately followed these two foundational works consisted primarily of supplementary writings from the social sciences, which examined different aspects of the movement already touched upon by Lincoln and Essien-Udom. But as noted by historian Claude A.

---

Clegg III, both the “scholarly and journalistic interest movement” declined markedly after the departure of Malcolm X from the Nation in the winter of 1963-1964:

From then until the present, academic and nonmember writers have studied, almost without exception, the separatist organization only in reference to the life and experiences of Malcolm X and, to a lesser degree, Louis Farrakhan—the Nation of Islam inspiring little of the literature in and of itself.23

Clegg addressed this void by providing a historical analysis of the life and work of Elijah Muhammad who, despite his overwhelming importance in shaping the history of “American Islam and African-American racial consciousness,” had been neglected in scholarly works for over twenty years after his death in 1976. But the general lack of up-to-date, scholarly studies of African-American Islam contributes to the prevailing ignorance concerning the character of this religion’s place in the African-American community.24


Recently, however, there has been a new current of literature that addresses African-American Islam from the perspective of religious studies that place it in the context of national (and to a lesser extent, global) religious and social trends. One scholar who has been particularly active in this thrust is Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Professor of Islamic History at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Three recent volumes co-edited by Haddad address Islam’s history, existence, and role in the African-American community. In the 1993 work, *Mission to America: Five Islamic Sectarian Communities in North America*, Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith examined five different Islamic sects, three of which involved African Americans. Concerning the Ahmadiyya movement, which began to proselytize in the 1920s, the scholars assert that most of that most of that sect’s appeal in America “has been to the black community, and in the early days most of the members of the centers in the eastern and central United States were African-American converts.” The other two African-American organizations addressed were the Moorish Science Temple and the Ansaru Allah Community, a contemporary sect that formerly had a very large community in West Philadelphia from the 1980s to the early 1990s.\(^{25}\)

*Mission to America* focused on African-Americans in three sects deemed “heterodox,” giving uninformed readers the impression that most blacks still belong to proto-Islamic sects. The 1994 work, *Muslim Communities in North America*, however, balances this depiction and examines two contemporary African-American Islamic institutions that are orthodox and another that is a

\(^{25}\) Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith, *Mission to America: Five Islamic Sectarian*
contemporary Black-nationalist, proto-Islamic sect. Of particular interest is R.M. Mukhtar Curtis’s article, “Urban Muslims: The Formation of the Dar ul-Islam Movement,” which provides the history of what was once “the largest indigenous Sunni Muslim group in the United States until 1975, when Warith Deen Muhammad proclaimed Sunni Islam as the religion of the Nation of Islam bringing 100,000 members into the fold.” The Dar ul-Islam movement, which was formally established in New York during the late 1960s, shows that orthodox Sunni Islam was already making inroads among urbanized African-Americans prior to the Nation of Islam’s subsequent shift to orthodoxy in the 1970s. This national orthodox movement was established in several cities with the largest communities existing in New York, Cleveland, and Philadelphia. The movement’s Philadelphia community became noted for its influence in education and its production of an introductory course, *Mubadi al-Islam: Fundamentals of Islam*, which was eventually “adopted by many other mosques throughout the movement.” This historical information produced by Curtis is important to this particular study since it provides more insight into the presence of Islam in Philadelphia’s Black community. Two other relevant articles in this volume were Yusuf Nuruddin’s “The Five Percenters: A Teenage Nation of Gods and Earths” and “Masjid ul-Mutkabir: The Portrait of an African-American Orthodox Muslim Community.”


The most recent of work involving Yvonne Y. Haddad is *Muslims on the Americanization Path*, a volume that contains several articles relevant to the history of African-American Islam. The most important of these are Ernest Allen’s “Identity and Destiny: The Formative Views of the Moorish Science Temple and the Nation of Islam,” Yusuf Nuruddin’s “African-American Muslims and the Question of Identity: Between Traditional Islam, African Heritage, and the American Way,” and Robert Dannin’s “Understanding the Multi-Ethnic Dilemma of African-American Muslims.” These three studies analyzed the historical and social evolution of African-American conceptions of Islam, their relation to the larger Islamic world, inter-ethnic/racial relations with Muslim immigrants, ideological conflict between different African-American Islamic sects, and other related topics. The issues addressed in these several articles reveal a marked progression in the discussion of Islam’s twentieth-century history among African Americans and the contemporary concerns involving its current presence.27

In 1999, Sulayman S. Nyang published *Islam in the United States of America*, a compilation of several essays that examine various aspects of Islam’s history and current status in the United States. Much of the historical information touches upon the early Islamic presence before and during American slavery, Muslim immigration during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the processes of institution building, and the proselytizing of various Islamic movements. Much of the work focuses on the experiences and concerns of Muslim

27 Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito eds., *Muslims on the Americanization Path*
immigrants, and does not focus specifically on the evolution of Islam among African Americans. Islamic development among African Americans is examined in the context of its relation to the general expansion and establishment of the religion in the United States.  

A final but important work that addresses the history of Islam among African Americans is Aminah Beverly McCloud's, *African American Islam*, which was published in 1995. McCloud's work identified eleven different African-American Islamic movements and communities that existed between 1913 and 1960, and asserted that several million African-American Muslims were "distributed across at least seventeen distinct communities" or movements by the 1990s. The most important insight contributed by McCloud's work, however, is her analysis of the conflict between the concepts of 'asabiya and ummah, two terms which pertain to different aspects of the "conception and constitution of community life." McCloud shows that the conflict between these two concepts defines much of the twentieth-century history and evolution of African-American Islam, and is thus a valuable tool in analyzing the ideological shifts that have occurred in these Islamic movements.  

McCloud explains that the Arabic term, 'asabiya "refers to kinship relations, which exert themselves in a feeling of tribal solidarity, common ethical understandings and, ultimately, in a community identity." McCloud states that this term represents a "key theme in the history of African-American Islam—
namely, the theme of *nation-building,*” and African-American Islam “can be viewed as the history of a people attempting to create ‘asbiya in a hostile environment.” This concept is analogous to the idea of identity formation that Essien-Udom and C. Eric Lincoln examined in their works. The term *ummah,* however, refers to the international community of believers in Islam who must put aside their individual and group identities in order to unify all Muslims across their “specific national, ethnic, and cultural boundaries.” The conflict between these two positions are manifested in the continuous tension that has existed within the African-American Islamic movement, particularly between those that conform to orthodox standards and those that adhere to Black-nationalist forms of Islamic expression. The former seeks to establish a unified Muslim identity with the global world of Islam while the latter concentrates on the need for an empowered Black self-identity and community.  

All of the aforementioned work is valuable to this study. But its national focus limits its ability to move significantly beyond generalities. Focussing on the Black populace of a specific city provides clearer insight into the religion’s effect on the day-to-day lives of African Americans. It also provides much detail related to this significant socio-cultural phenomenon of twentieth-century African-American urbanization. The current manifestations can only be understood by analyzing the local and national social forces that impacted the Black populace of Philadelphia in the late 1960s and 1970s—setting the

---

30 Ibid., 5.
foundation for Islam’s growth from a fringe movement into a legitimate religious institution and cultural entity within that city’s Black community.

By examining the development of Islam among Blacks in Philadelphia, in the context of the tumultuous social, cultural, and political climate of the late 1960s and early 1970s, this study provides insight into a concrete case of African-American cultural transformation during that period. This period witnessed significant processes of migration, urbanization, deindustrialization, and the social movements of the 1960s that altered the social and economic realities, as well as the political consciousness, of millions of African Americans. All of these factors contributed to tens of thousands African Americans converting to Islam.

This study argues that during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Nation of Islam in Philadelphia was able to capitalize on a new popularity and support for the nationalistic ideas inherent in the “Black Power” concept, and therefore effectively propagandize and promote its program to a highly receptive and increasingly sympathetic Black public. Through the effective use of local forms of Black media outlets, the Nation of Islam was able to disseminate its views and tap into the popularity of these nationalistic view that were actually compatible with many of the tenets of its own program. Although the overwhelming majority of the current African-American Muslims in Philadelphia are now mainstream, orthodox Sunni Muslims, it was the successful proselytizing of the Nation of Islam during the 1970s that established the base for Philadelphia’s current, sizeable, African-American-Islamic population.
This study analyzes the publicly recognized activities of the Nation of Islam’s Philadelphia mosque during the key years of growth, beginning in 1967, and proceeding to 1976 when the sect began to move in the direction of orthodoxy. The socio-cultural context of the period is established first, by providing a general historical overview of the marked demographic shifts in Philadelphia’s African-American population during the Great Migration of the World War I era and the even larger migration during the post-World War II period. This overview examines the ways in which the sharp expansion of Philadelphia’s Black population altered the earlier cultural traditions as well as the social, political, and economic circumstances of Black Philadelphia. Special attention is focussed on the alternative forms of Black religious institutions (termed “cults” in the contemporary literature) that proliferated during this period, revealing an early milieu in which many Blacks were exposed to new, alternative forms of religious thought and expression and that, therefore, an environment existed that was conducive to the successful establishment and growth of the Nation of Islam, and later Sunni Islam, in Philadelphia. These local social and political changes are also analyzed in the context of the national social and political changes that influenced many Blacks, in cities such as Philadelphia, to be more receptive to the Nation of Islam’s recruitment efforts and public relations campaign during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Because the Nation of Islam was almost a quasi-secret society, conventional sources, such as membership rolls, financial records, and other such important resources, are not readily available. Therefore this study cannot
provide a detailed analysis of membership, attrition, or the general inner-workings of the local mosque. Instead, the focus here is on the relation of Islam to the broader Black community and on the public activities that the Nation of Islam embarked on in its effort to create and control its public image and gain new converts. Therefore media sources—from Black, mainstream, and the Nation of Islam’s own outlets—are used as the primary references since those were the chief vehicles through which their public relations and recruitment campaigns were conducted. The relative success of these campaigns can also be determined by the general tone in which the Nation of Islam’s activities are depicted in the outlets other than those that were their own.

Philadelphia based newspapers make up the bulk of primary sources used in this study. The *Philadelphia Tribune*, the city’s leading African-American newspaper provides reports that deal specifically with issues relating to the Black community during the time period examined. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Philadelphia Daily News* provide mainstream perspectives concerning these same issues. *Muhammad Speaks*, the Nation of Islam’s newspaper, is also used as an internal source of information and discussion.

The various secondary sources were used to establish the local and national socio-political context of Islam’s evolution in Philadelphia. The literature concerning Islam’s national growth and evolution are used to compare and track and the developments that were occurring in Philadelphia’s Islamic community. Other secondary sources provide information concerning the local and national social-political trends that were occurring among African Americans
during the period of study, especially those involving the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. Several studies were particularly valuable in providing insight into the social and political concerns of Philadelphia’s Black community during the period of study. Among these were a 1998 dissertation entitled, *Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia, 1940-1971* by Matthew Countryman, *Build, Brother, Build* by Reverend Leon Sullivan, and *Black Politics in Philadelphia*, which was edited by Miriam Ershkowitz and Joseph Zikmund II. Various works from the social sciences provided information concerning the structural changes that were occurring in Philadelphia during the period, and how urbanization and deindustrialization affected conditions of crime, poverty, and housing. Notable among these works were *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal: Urban Planning in Philadelphia, 1920-1974* by John F. Bauman, and *Philadelphia: Neighborhoods, Division and Conflict in a Postindustrial City*, edited by Carolyn Adams and David Bartelt, *William Dorsey’s Philadelphia and Ours* by Roger Lane, and *W.E.B. DuBois, Race, and the City*, edited by Michael B. Katz and Thomas Sugrue.

The study centers on the Nation of Islam since the consensus among scholars confirms that this proto-Islamic movement was the chief and most successful proponent of Islamic concepts among African Americans during the time period examined. An analysis of the Nation of Islam’s activities in Philadelphia, in the context of the intense social and political transformations that were occurring during the 1960s and 1970s, provides insight into that movement’s expansion among that city’s African Americans. This account of the Nation of
Islam’s activities in Philadelphia during the 1960s and 1970s shows how that movement capitalized on the desire of many of that city’s African Americans for Black institutional, political, economic, and social empowerment. The Nation of Islam’s expansion in Philadelphia by the mid-1970s was significant enough to establish that organization as a legitimate religious alternative, providing the foundation for the eventual ascent of orthodox forms of Islam among the city’s blacks. The history of this particular case provides a glimpse into a distinct instance of socio-cultural and religious transformation among one urbanize, Black population.
CHAPTER 1

The Roots and Development of Religious Alternatives

During the mid-twentieth century, the religion of Islam had its most significant impact on Philadelphia’s Black community and the city, in general, in the form of a sect called the Nation of Islam (NOI). Although the organization earned much national notoriety because of its controversial beliefs—such as its proclamations that whites were a race of devils from whom Blacks needed to separate—it was, early on, just another of several such religious sects that were expanding in Philadelphia and other Black communities of the urban North. The religious organization had been active in the city since the mid-1950s, but by the 1970s, it experienced unprecedented growth, became more visible, and increased its involvement in many of the larger political, economic, and social activities of the city’s Black community. In the early period, the local mosque in Philadelphia appears to have been a very insular institution and primarily concerned with its own internal religious and organizational matters; accounts of the NOI’s involvement in the broader political and cultural concerns of the Black community are scarce.\textsuperscript{31} However, there were certain key social developments in

\textsuperscript{31} To a degree, this may be attributed to a certain level of tension with the outside world that had always been a component of the Nation of Islam’s culture. As C. Eric Lincoln observed in his 1961 study, the “Black Muslims are psychologically indrawn: they feel responsible only to each other and derive most of their satisfaction from their own mutual approval. Yet they are also aware of the world around them—and confidently aware that the world is aware of them.... To a great
the earlier decades of the twentieth century that set the stage for the Nation of Islam’s sharp growth and expanded influence in the 1970s.

Like other northern cities, Philadelphia was a major destination for thousands of Blacks migrating from the South during the first half of the twentieth century. This mass migration of newcomers augmented a vibrant Black community that had been established as early as the 1700s. From the late eighteenth into the nineteenth century, Philadelphia contained one of the largest and most influential population of free Blacks in America. During the antebellum period, Philadelphia was a major destination for Blacks who had escaped from slavery, and after the Civil War, large streams of freed Blacks began to migrate to the city from states such as Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and to a lesser extent, North Carolina. By the turn of the century, the presence of this large Black, urbanized population in the North was significant enough to be chosen as the subject of a major study conducted by W.E.B. Du Bois.  

W.E.B. Du Bois’s book, The Philadelphia Negro, thoroughly detailed the social conditions of Blacks living in late-nineteenth-century Philadelphia. According to the 1890 census, there were 39,371 Blacks in Philadelphia, which
was about four percent of the city’s total population. Of the various social problems that were documented among this Black population, Du Bois identified the “question of economic survival as the most pressing of all questions.” Du Bois explained that there was a wide-reaching form of systematic racial discrimination operating in Philadelphia that confined the bulk of the city’s Blacks to domestic service and various forms of unskilled labor. Du Bois concluded that most of the other social problems that he observed—such as crime, pauperism, the growth of slums, and other such conditions—could be traced back to this central problem of racial discrimination, which made it difficult for many Blacks to make a living or earn adequate wages. Although Du Bois suggested that Blacks should do what they could to improve their conditions, he insisted that only the city’s whites could remedy the fundamental problem of racism, by simply changing their attitudes and actions towards the city’s Black citizens. Yet, this central problem of Black exclusion from the expanding manufacturing industry, from adequate housing, and other such essential resources, would persist well into the twentieth century and would be the primary theme defining the later struggles between the African-American and white citizens of Philadelphia. In spite of this rigid social and economic marginalization, Philadelphia’s Black community responded to their circumstances by drawing on a rich heritage of self-determination and focussed on building their own autonomous social organizations and institutions. The center of Black social life in Philadelphia was the church, which served as the primary source of spiritual sustenance, news,
information, and entertainment. The churches also helped establish essential institutions, such as schools and beneficial societies, to serve its constituents. ³³

W.E.B. Du Bois’s 1897 study provides a detailed glimpse into the living conditions of Black Philadelphians at the end of the nineteenth-century and documents the institutions that Blacks established to confront these conditions. But as the twentieth century unfolded, the city experienced extreme demographic and social transitions that altered the unique character of the community that Du Bois had studied. The key factor producing this transformation was the massive migration of Blacks from the South during the “Great Migration” of the World War I era, and then, the heavy migration during and following World War II. The rapid expansion of Philadelphia’s Black population would lead to a marked magnification of the same process of geographical segregation and organized racial discrimination that Du Bois had documented decades earlier.

The first migration during the World War I era—from 1916 to 1924—had a major impact on the city of Philadelphia. The process of absorbing thousands of new Black residents affected the cultural institutions of the Black community and intensified the level of racial discrimination from whites. Although the Great Migration was certainly of great concern to mainstream institutions such as the Philadelphia Housing Association and progressive minded whites, the affairs of the Black populace remained largely invisible and of no great concern to the general white populace. And ensuring that the city’s growing Black populace remained “invisible,” whites in Philadelphia began to bar Blacks from certain

---

³³ Du Bois, 97, 394.
schools, restaurants, hotels and other forms of public accommodations.

Ultimately, the city’s established Black community felt the most significant impact of the Great Migration.

The reactions of native Black Philadelphians (called “Old Philadelphians”) towards the southern migrants, were mixed. The leadership of esteemed Black churches such as Bethel African Methodist Episcopal, Allen African Methodist Episcopal, and East Calvary Methodist Episcopal welcomed the migrants and sought to accommodate them. Since the foremost problem confronting recent migrants was the lack of sufficient housing, organizations affiliated with the Black churches assisted the new arrivals in finding employment and living accommodations. But many of the ministers were disappointed by the fact that some of their church members resented the newcomers and expressed varying forms of hostility towards them. The immediate cause of this hostility was sparked by the desire of these Old Philadelphians to retain control over their churches during a period in which the increasing numbers of southern members were gaining influence. But perhaps more important, many of the Old Philadelphians believed that the influx of southern migrants was responsible for an increase in white racism and a deterioration of the quality of life in the Black community because of overcrowding.

---


35 Ballard, 187,188; Gregg, 195-205.
The Great Migration nearly tripled Philadelphia’s Black population during a twenty-year period—from a little over 84,000 in 1910 to 222,504 in 1930, and it also produced a level of intraracial (class) and cultural stratification that was considerably more complex than that which Du Bois recorded in his study. There had always been a moderate stream of southern migration to Philadelphia, but because of the huge influx of migrants during the Great Migration, it became more difficult for the existing community to assimilate the large numbers of new residents into the traditional Black institutions. The social background and place of origin of these new migrants was also different from the previous migrants. The earlier migrants had come primarily from Maryland, Virginia, and Delaware, and many of them had lived in other cities such as Richmond, Washington, and Baltimore. But the majority of the migrants arriving during the Great Migration came from South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. Although many of these new migrants had also spent time in cities such as Savannah and Jacksonville, a significant portion of them came from farms and had no experience with city life. This new mix produced distinct forms of intraracial tension and prejudice based on family background, length of residence in Philadelphia, and place of origin. Many Old Philadelphians were prejudiced against all southerners, and some upper-South natives were prejudiced against Blacks from the “Deep South.”

The increased diversity of subcultures that became apparent among Black Philadelphians following the Great Migration eventually contributed to a proliferation of new churches throughout the 1920s. Some of the southerners who

36 Ballard, 187, 188, 198-204; Gregg, 23-25.
had been members of certain denominations in the South, such as the A.M.E. church, readily joined sister churches in Philadelphia, such as Mother Bethel. Others, however, were not comfortable with the large urban churches and longed to worship in atmospheres that were similar to the small, intimate churches of their rural backgrounds. Although churches such as Bethel continued to address the needs of both native Black Philadelphians and the recent migrants, the Black population became too large and diverse to have all of its varying concerns addressed by the existing religious institutions.

The leadership of community institutions and established Black churches, such as Bethel A.M.E., enthusiastically welcomed the new migrants, but they sometimes regarded the southerners as an uncultured group that needed to be polished or “uplifted” for city life. Many of these southerners rejected the idea that they were in need of “uplift” and sought to hold on to cherished elements of their Black southern culture. Many preferred to worship with other southerners and sometimes founded churches with migrants from the same hometown or state. Even within the established Black Philadelphia churches that welcomed the migrants, southerners formed clubs and societies based on state of origin. In any case, the migration produced a rapid “southernization” of Philadelphia’s Black community, and by 1930, nearly seventy percent of all Blacks in Philadelphia had been born in the South.37

After the Great Migration, the historic A.M.E. churches in Philadelphia began to lose ground to Black Baptist churches and other denominations that were

---

37 Gregg, 196, 211-216; Ballard, 174-178, 184; Bauman, 33.
often founded by southern migrants. The less-hierarchical structure of the Baptist denomination allowed for a greater degree of independence for individual institutions and a less complicated process for establishing new churches. Allen Ballard recounts the history of Morris Chapel Baptist Church in Philadelphia, which was founded by five families from Greenwood, South Carolina and named after the Morris Chapel Church that they had all attended back in Greenwood. The congregation grew rapidly, eventually accepting members from other parts of South Carolina and other southern states, and over the years, Morris Chapel spawned other Baptist churches. Robert Gregg notes that the 55 churches and missions in Philadelphia during the period of Du Bois’s study in 1897 had increased to 205 by 1932, including 115 that were housed in storefronts, houses, halls, and theaters. During the Depression era, this proliferation would continue, producing not only new Baptist institutions, but also new denominations and sects that were unique to the urban North.\(^{38}\)

Many of these new religious movements were radically different from the old, established institutions that had long served as the center of Philadelphia’s Black community. *Black Gods of the Metropolis*, Arthur H. Fauset’s anthropological study of what he termed “cults” existing among Black Philadelphians during the Depression era, examines organizations that exhibited doctrinal deviations from the basic tenets of the mainstream Christian denominations. Fauset organized the groups he observed into categories of Faith Healing, Holiness, Pentecostal, and Nationalistic. The specific organizations that

\(^{38}\) ibid.; see also, Lincoln and Mamiya, 82.
Fauset investigated were the Mt. Sinai Holy Church of America, Inc., the United House of Prayer for All People, the Church of God (Black Jews), the Father Divine Peace Mission Movement, and the Moorish Science Temple of America.

Although, at the time, Fauset acknowledged that “the number of cult worshippers is substantial and appears to be increasing,” he presumed that the members of these organizations consist largely of a small, fringe portion of Philadelphia’s Black population. Fauset, however, expressed concern for the older established Black churches and stated that:

> With the migration of Negroes from the rural South to urban centers, a transformation in the basic religious life and attitudes...is observable. The church, once a *sine qua non* of institutional life among American Negroes, does not escape the critical inquiry of the newer generations, who implicitly and sometimes explicitly are requiring definite pragmatic sanctions if they are to be included among churchgoers, or if indeed they are to give any consideration at all to religious practices and beliefs.”\(^{39}\)

Fauset noted that these new churches and religious sects differed from the traditional mainstream denominations in that they addressed, in various forms, the unique spiritual needs and social concerns of the recently urbanized masses. As C. Eric Lincoln explained later in his study of the Nation of Islam, which he classified as a type of mass movement, rather than a “cult”:

> A mass movement usually begins with the degeneration of some familiar corporate structure—a church, in the sense of a religious denomination, or a major social or political unit—that has formerly maintained the social equilibrium. So long as this established structure is strong and vigorous in its social concern, mass movements do not develop. There is no need of them. But as established corporate ties dissolve—as the masses are dislocated

---

from their “hereditary milieu”—many individuals become highly receptive to the new corporate unity implicit in a mass movement. ⁴⁰

Considering the significant social and geographical shift experienced by millions of African-Americans during the Great Migration and the Depression, Fauset was essentially observing a process in which a portion of the recently urbanized Blacks in Philadelphia was attempting to build institutions that were relevant to their new social reality.

Corresponding with Fauset’s Philadelphia study and providing a further analysis of the evolution of African-American religion during the twentieth century, anthropologists Baer and Singer established four categories of religious expression that developed among Blacks by the early decades of that century. These religious categories consist of those classified as mainstream denominations, messianic-nationalistic sects, conversionist sects, and thaumaturgical sects. The mainstream denominations were those that were grounded in two earlier religious movements from the nineteenth century, the first involving “groups of free Blacks who separated from predominantly white congregations prior to the Civil War and the second [consisting] largely of former slaves who separated from the white Baptists after the Civil War.” In the context of Philadelphia’s Black community, churches such as Bethel A.M.E. fall in the first category, consisting of the mainstream denominations which broke off from white churches before the Civil War. The scholars posited that although many of the congregations in these organizations included working-class and

lower-class members, their leadership and orientation was generally middle-
class. 41

Conversionist sects consisted of Blacks who sought to engage in more
ecstatic forms of worship and conversion experiences that they believed were
beginning to disappear in the mainstream sects. These conversionist sects
consisted of the many Pentecostal, Holiness, and some of the small, independent
Baptist churches that arose in the early part of the century, many of them
beginning as storefront institutions. The thaumaturgical sects included the
various “spiritualist” churches and organizations that resorted to “magico-
religious” rituals or various forms of esoteric knowledge that were believed to
provide individuals with spiritual power over themselves and others. 42

And finally, the various messianic-nationalist sects are those organizations
that combined traditional Black nationalism with religious belief, and holding the
“ultimate objective of achieving some degree of political, social, cultural, and/or
economic autonomy.” The scholars state that sects of this type are generally
founded by “charismatic individuals regarded by their followers as messiahs or
‘messengers’ of God, if not God in human form, who will deliver Blacks from the
oppressive yoke of white dominance.” During the early part of the century, these
messianic-nationalist sects were represented by organizations that resorted to
Islamic, Jewish/Hebrew, as well as Christian motifs as their religious foundations.

95
41 Baer and Singer, 57-64.
42 ibid.
Increasingly, however, messianic-religious sects rejected Christian symbolism and adopted Judaic and Islamic veneers. The impact and influence of the Garvey movement, which had a very active UNIA chapter in Philadelphia, must also be considered when examining the proliferation of these new messianic-nationalist movements. Although some of the sects actually preceded the Garvey movement, their increased presence during the 1920s and the Depression era can be attributed to the same social forces that contributed to Garvey’s mass success and to the increased popularity of nationalist ideas that resulted from his movement. Wilson Jeremiah Moses argues that the Garvey movement was the culmination of “The Golden Age of Black Nationalism,” which had existed since the late 1700s but peaked during the years between 1850 and Garvey’s imprisonment in 1925. Moses argues that Marcus Garvey was able to capitalize on a “new urban mass consciousness” that arose among Blacks following the migration, and the resulting movement was based on orthodox Black nationalism “modified by an urban environment, industrial rhetoric, and a military spirit that was the result of the Great War.”

Although Garveyism was primarily grounded in a philosophy of political and economic Black nationalism, there was also a strong religious component to the movement that advanced a Black oriented theology, which included the idea of a Black God and Christ. Randall K. Burkett argues that Garveyism itself, was

---

43 ibid.
a type of religious movement that sought to institutionalize a new, Black civil
religion. Burkett suggests that the religious element of the Garvey movement—
such as its Black nationalist oriented hymns, its rituals, and its Catechism—“were
not mere strategies for mobilizing the Black masses, but were, rather a serious
attempt to provide a ‘coherent way of viewing the world’ for a people whose old
certainties had been shaken” by the Great Migration, World War I, a series of
devastating race riots, as well as a post-War depression. The various messianic-
nationalist religious movements that proliferated during that period essentially
embarked on this same task and attempted to create unique world-views that were
compatible with the new mass consciousness of the recently urbanized Black
populations. 45

Among the five organizations documented in Arthur Fauset’s study of new
religious movements among Philadelphia’s Blacks, the Moorish Science Temple
is important for our purposes in that it was the first of a series of Islamic or
“proto-Islamic”46 sects that arose during the early twentieth century. Founded in
Newark, New Jersey in 1913 by a North Carolina migrant named Timothy Drew
(Noble Drew Ali), the Moorish Science Temple quickly spread to other northern
cities and was first established in Philadelphia around 1928. Some scholars posit

45 Randall K. Burkett, Garveyism as a Religious Movement: The Institutionalization of a Black
46 The term, “proto-Islamic” refers to sects that incorporate some forms of Islamic terminology,
belief or practice within their rituals, but deviate in other ways from some of the fundamental
tenets of orthodox Islamic practice and theology. Therefore these sects are considered “non-
orthodox” and are not always included or considered within the fold of Islam. In the American
context, however, these groups served the function of establishing an awareness of Islam in
communities that previously had no knowledge of the religion. The Moorish Science Temple, the
Ahmadiyyah Movement, and The Nation of Islam are the three “proto-Islamic” sects that had the
that many members of the Moorish Science Temple were former Garveyites who began to join some of the proliferating messianic-nationalistic sects after their own movement declined; and some Moorish Scientists believed that Noble Drew Ali was a type of messiah or Christ figure, while Marcus Garvey filled the role of John the Baptist. At any rate, after Garvey’s deportation, The Moorish Science Temple was so successful at attracting Garvey’s followers in Philadelphia that “Philadelphian Garveyites actually wrote the United States authorities in 1935 asking for Garvey’s return to combat the usurpation of Garvey by this group.” Their letter indicated that the “Moorish-Americans were enticing away UNIA members” under the pretense that they were now responsible for Garvey’s work since he could no longer return.47

The Moorish Science Temple was not an orthodox Islamic movement. It formulated its own concept of “Islam” and propagated its unique belief system throughout the Black community of Philadelphia and other cities. The Moorish Science Temple’s beliefs were actually based on a mixture of ideas adopted from the Garvey movement, Masonry, esoteric philosophy, and the rudiments of Islam.

Scholar Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, contends that Noble Drew Ali was perhaps

---

47 Adib Rashad, *Elijah Muhammad & The Ideological Foundation of the Nation of Islam* (Hampton, VA: U.B. & U.S. Communications Systems, 1994), 53; C. Eric Lincoln, 52-53; Tony Martin, 74-77. Martin explains that although the religious symbolism in Garveyism appealed primarily to Christian motifs, “Garvey considered differences in religion such as Christianity and Islam as inconsequential since they were but different ways of worshipping God.” Garveyism therefore provided a sympathetic forum for the “budding Islamic movement” which Martin observes is “interesting in light of the rapid post-Garvey spread of Islam among Afro-Americans.”
"the first African-American Islamic sectarian leader to invoke basic Islamic symbols to unite” African Americans.\textsuperscript{48}

The Moorish Science Temple was essentially a religious movement based within the larger history of traditional African-American nationalism. The Moorish Science Temple, however, like the majority of Black messianic-nationalist religious movements that arose in the twentieth century, rejected the Christian element that had traditionally been a fundamental component of historic Black nationalism. Instead, the Moorish Science Temple adopted an Islamic veneer while some of the other sects incorporated elements of Judaism.

Traditional Black nationalist goals were clearly emphasized in the Moorish Science Temple’s program, which aimed to:

1. Dispense charity and provide for the mutual assistance of its members in times of distress.
2. Aid in the improvement of health and encourage the ownership of better homes.
3. Find employment for members.
4. Teach those fundamental principles which are desired for civilization, such as obedience to law, loyalty to government (of its own nation of Moors), tolerance and unity.

These objectives were obviously geared towards meeting the basic needs of the recently urbanized Black populations of northern cities, and were grounded in the earlier African-American religious traditions of self-help and mutual aid.\textsuperscript{49}

Although the majority of Philadelphia’s Black population did not convert to these various nationalistic religious sects, the presence of this assortment of alternative belief systems must have produced an atmosphere in which many

Black Philadelphians were exposed to and became familiar with ideas that deviated from the teachings of the mainstream Christian denominations. Before the Second World War, there had been several different Black Judaic sects in the city, a very active UNIA chapter representing the Garvey movement, and an active branch of the Moorish Science Temple. Thus, when ministers from the Nation of Islam began to proselytize in the city during the early 1950s, their radical, nationalistic teachings—and their introduction of a belief system termed “Islam”—would not necessarily have been alien or unfamiliar to many of those who heard the message. In fact, Malcolm X would later marvel at the swiftness in which Philadelphia’s Blacks responded to his evangelizing, remarking that the Nation of Islam’s Temple number 12 was established in less than three months during the spring of 1954.\(^5^0\)

During the years immediately following its 1954 establishment in Philadelphia, the Nation of Islam’s Temple number 12 experienced modest growth and operated on the fringes of the mainstream and traditional institutions of the city’s Black community. Temple number 12, consisted of a small corps of committed believers who concentrated, primarily, on the internal affairs of the organization. In its early years, the mosque’s growth was not significant enough to have made a major impact on the general African-American community.

\(^{49}\) Adib Rashad, 53, 54.  
\(^{50}\) Each of the Nation of Islam’s local, established houses of worship were originally referred to as “temples.” Later, in the 1960s, the temples began to be called “mosques.” The local temples in each city were numbered in the order of their founding, thus, Philadelphia’s Temple No. 12 was the twelfth mosque to be established in a U.S. city. See, Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley* (New York: Balantine Books, 1964), 215.
Four years after its founding, Elijah Muhammad entrusted Temple number 12 to his son Wallace D. Muhammad who led the mosque between 1958 and 1960. Wallace Muhammad admitted later that when he was assigned to the Philadelphia temple, he “had no experience as an administrator or as a resident minister responsible for [a] congregation and paying bills and all of that.” He was only a young minister who had been “given the opportunity to speak occasionally in different places.” Wallace recalled that when his ministry began at the Philadelphia temple, there were less than a hundred active members, but after a few months attendance rose to between four and five hundred persons. But Wallace Muhammad’s leadership was likely hindered by personal doubts regarding the truth of his father’s teachings. For a significant portion of Wallace’s adult life, he vacillated between a half-hearted acceptance of the Nation of Islam’s teachings and outright rejection of them in favor of orthodox Sunni Islam. In 1960, Wallace left the Nation of Islam for the first of several times to pursue his own religious and ideological quest. It was not until the late 1960s, that the Muslims of Temple number 12 began to truly establish their presence Philadelphia’s Black community. During that time, the leaders of Temple number 12 began to collaborate and work with other Black political and social organizations in the city. Consequently, in order to understand fully this establishment and growth of the Nation of Islam in Philadelphia, the various social, political, and geographical developments of Philadelphia’s Black community must be examined.  

---

51 Imam W. Deen Mohammed, “City of Brotherly Love:” Mohammed Speaks on Philadelphia in
Although the Great Migration of the World War I era was significant in that it radically altered the character of Philadelphia’s older Black community, the massive migration of the post-World War II era—referred to as the “Second Migration”—transformed the racial character of the entire city. The earlier migration of the World War I era had rapidly expanded Philadelphia’s Black population, and by 1930 the city’s Black population had increased to over 222,000 compared to a little over 84,000 in 1910. The migration receded sharply during the Great Depression, and by 1940, Philadelphia’s Black population had increased only by several thousand or, a little over ten percent to 250,880. During the twenty-year period between 1940 and 1960, however, Philadelphia’s Black population doubled again to 529,240—making it the third largest Black population center after New York and Chicago; and by 1970, Philadelphia’s inner-city Black population would peak at over 650,000. The decade of most rapid growth in Black population occurred during the 1950s when over 126,000 new Black residents moved into the city, primarily from South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, and Georgia. The migrants during this era were attracted to

---

Kernersville, NC, July 31, “Muslim Journal 17 September 1999. The term “Second Migration” refers to the large migration of Black southerners to northern and western cities during the World War II era. Southern migrants were drawn to job opportunities that became available because of the rapid expansion of defense industries and the subsequent labor shortages due to the war effort. In Philadelphia, the immediate results of this migration were reflected in the increase of Philadelphia’s Black workforce, which grew from 74,000 to 130,000 between 1940 and 1943. Philadelphia’s Black population actually doubled during the 1940s. See, Bauman, 84; Countryman, 42, 85; Komori Woodard, A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri (Leroy Jones) and Black Power Politics (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 11.
Philadelphia because of job opportunities produced in the city's expanding defense industry during World War II.\footnote{Bauman, 84-86; Carolyn Adams, David Bartelt, et al., \textit{Philadelphia: Neighborhood, Division, and Conflict in a Postindustrial City} (Philadelphia: Temple UP), 75, 79.}

Traditionally, Blacks in Philadelphia had always been excluded from manufacturing jobs, but during the war years, new opportunities were opened for Blacks in the industrial sector due to labor shortages and the activism of local and national Black organizations (such as A. Philip Randolph's March on Washington Movement). Though often relegated to lower-wage positions, by 1960 there was greater proportion of Philadelphia Blacks "working as operatives in the factories from which they had so long been shut out." However, there was a major economic transition underway. Reflecting national trends that were occurring in many other cities, especially in the Northeast and Midwest, Philadelphia's postwar economy was shifting from a manufacturing base to an economy dominated by business and consumer services. Between 1955 and 1975, Philadelphia lost three out of four of its industrial jobs, a major economic decline that would shape the employment problems confronting Blacks after the 1950s.\footnote{Adams and Bartelt, 51, 81; Roger Lane, \textit{William Dorsey's Philadelphia and Ours: On the Past and Future of the Black City in America} (New York: Oxford UP, 1991), 363.}

Thus, when Philadelphia—and the region as a whole—began to "deindustrialize" and shift to a post-industrial economy, the thousands of new Black residents eventually exceeded new job opportunities.\footnote{Deindustrialization refers to the decline of America's manufacturing industries. In the two decades following World War II, however, Philadelphia's economy began to "deindustrialize" or shift from manufacturing to various service-based enterprises. Technological advances and increased automation expanded manufacturers' "efficiency and volume of production" and allowed them to increase production with fewer workers; thus, manufacturing industries began to reduce their workforces. Along with these changes in manufacturers' mode of production, other states.
the city’s Blacks were able to gain employment in Philadelphia’s public-sector, particularly those who were skilled or had attained some level of education, the economic shift severely hurt those Blacks who had anticipated employment opportunities in the city’s declining industrial sectors. Renewed methods of racial discrimination were adopted to restrict Black access to the declining industrial jobs and to confine Blacks to specific spatial areas of the city. Thus, the heavy post-War migration, and the systematic racial discrimination that increased with it, completely transformed the geographical distribution of Philadelphia’s Black population and produced massive, predominantly Black ghettos that differed from the smaller Black enclaves of the earlier periods.\footnote{Adams and Bartelt, 51, 81; Lane, \textit{William Dorsey’s Philadelphia and Ours}, 363.}

The particular evolution of Black spatial distribution in Philadelphia was, in some ways, unique. The geographic distribution of Philadelphia’s Black community did not evolve from, or into, one large, distinctive “Black Belt” such as Harlem in New York City, Chicago’s Southside, or the Black enclave that developed in Cleveland. To a large extent, the residential development of Philadelphia’s Black community was more similar to that which occurred in nearby border cities such as Baltimore and Washington than it was to that which occurred in some of the other northern cities. Describing the spatial distribution...
of Washington, DC’s Black population, James Borchert states that unlike “the newly developing ghettos in northern cities where [B]lack residents grew increasingly concentrated in a single section, Washington’s ‘mini-ghettos’ were spread throughout the city, often in close proximity to the most expensive and elegant houses.” Similarly, in Philadelphia, as early as Du Bois’s study, it was noted that although South Philadelphia was the center of the Black community, Blacks were already “scattered in every ward of the city, and the great mass of them” were widely scattered “far from the whilom centre of colored settlement.” Since the location of work was the most important determinant of residence, Philadelphia’s Blacks were often clustered in alleys and small side-streets which were located behind the main streets where whites lived. Thus, until the Second World War, the residential segregation of Blacks in Philadelphia was regulated by streets and blocks, and not according to large-scale geographical sections.⁵⁷

The Second Migration produced a radical change in the geographical and spatial concentrations of the city’s Black populace. During the period of Du Bois’s study, the primary center of Black settlement was located in a distinct area of South Philadelphia. But by the 1950s, an even larger concentration of Blacks was in West Philadelphia, while the largest and arguably the new center of the city’s Black populace was located in North Philadelphia, which emerged as the city’s principal Black ghetto.⁵⁸ North Philadelphia in particular—where nearly

⁵⁸ Philadelphia is divided into distinct sections that are actually more than just standard neighborhoods, in terms of their larger physical size and population, but are not exactly
half of the city’s entire Black population had become concentrated—experienced a high level of overcrowding and poverty, and manifested much of the urban decay, residential/economic ghettoization, and the general post-industrial urban crisis that developed in the nation’s older cities during the postwar decades. Large numbers of Philadelphia’s unemployed and underemployed Black citizens were congested in this specific area, producing large tracts of impoverished neighborhoods. Besides the apparent problem of economic marginalization, the most immediate problem facing residents in North Philadelphia was the area’s poor housing conditions. Many of North Philadelphia’s row houses and brownstones that were originally constructed as single-family units were now divided up into apartments to accommodate the thousands of Blacks who began to migrate into the area, with each particular unit containing several families a-piece. This practice contributed to the high level of congestion and led to a rapid deterioration of the area’s housing units. 59

---

59 A 1956 study of residents in one North Philadelphia neighborhood discovered that 37 percent were jobless and 42 percent worked irregularly as domestics, service employees, and common
William Gardner Smith, a Black writer and Philadelphia native who had been living in Europe for sixteen years, expressed dismay when he first returned to the city in 1967. After visiting his family in South Philadelphia, Smith rode with one of his childhood friends to visit another friend who had relocated to North Philadelphia. Smith’s recollection of that visit provides further indication of the extreme conditions of poverty and overcrowding that had begun to develop in North Philadelphia:

We crossed Market Street and were soon in the Black ghetto of North Philadelphia—the biggest in the city. I received a shock: unlike the South Philadelphia ghetto, the one in North Philadelphia had become infinitely more decrepit in my absence. Street after street of dingy row houses, with doors like holes opening into musty, airless, almost lightless caves. Through the windows I saw the dirty, peeling wallpaper, or, in some houses, the newspapers which had been pasted up to serve as wallpaper. Mothers sat listlessly on stoops; scores of children scurried through the trash-littered streets; groups of five or six teen-agers loitered on corners—the army of the unemployed. I remarked to Dixon [Smith’s friend] that this ghetto was even worse than I had remembered it. He said, “These are the immigrants—the ones who flock up from the South. They really catch hell.” . . . [T]he bottom layer of Black society in Philadelphia had shifted northward geographically in the years of my absence, and these “immigrants” lived in a poverty I had never known.60

Although Smith mentions the high level of southern migration to North Philadelphia, the conditions of overcrowding and poverty must not be attributed to any presumed deficiencies in the residents who moved into this area, but to the systematic processes that confined this rapidly expanding population to the

---

bounds of a limited area. Blacks who migrated to Philadelphia sought to improve their economic and social conditions, but the larger processes of economic transition and the explicit forms of institutionalized racism restricted Black access to certain employment opportunities and from many of the city’s housing markets. Those who were less educated or lacked specific skills were impacted most severely by these larger factors, and were less able to mitigate them. In spite of this, Blacks in North Philadelphia—and the other predominantly Black areas of the city—strove to improve the quality of their lives.

Like Smith, prominent Black minister and activist, Reverend Leon Sullivan, who moved to the city in the 1950s to serve as the pastor of Zion Baptist Church, later recounted his initial impressions of North Philadelphia—indicating the severity of the conditions and the high level of deterioration that had occurred in the area:

I was flabbergasted at what I saw. I heard a great deal about Philadelphia’s [B]lack society and the good life of the Philadelphia colored man, but I had never seen so many dilapidated houses, row upon row, in my life. Harlem was bad enough, but North Philadelphia, where I rode that day, beat Harlem in housing decay. Buildings were deteriorating everywhere, and trash and garbage littered the streets. Wherever my eyes fell, I saw little [B]lack boys and girls in clusters playing on sidewalks, on stoops, and in hallways, trying to find childish joy and fun in the midst of dirt, roaches and garbage. I knew then that my work was cut out for me.61

Although there were also many well-kept streets and neighborhoods in North Philadelphia, particularly on blocks that had high homeownership and few of the rented tenements, by the early 1960s, the combined problem of economic

---

marginalization and exploitation, along with the housing problem caused by residential discrimination, produced a violent uprising in the area that expressed the rage of those who suffered most from these conditions.\(^{62}\)

In the summer of 1964, North Philadelphia experienced a violent race riot that began in a highly impoverished and overcrowded neighborhood referred to as “the Jungle.” The immediate cause of the uprising has been attributed to a false rumor, which alleged that a pregnant Black woman had been “beaten and shot to death by white police.” More significant, however, was the increasing frustrations that residents were feeling because of economic marginalization and overcrowding. The rampant brutality of Commissioner Frank Rizzo’s police force did not help matters. The riot, which began on a Friday night and continued through the weekend, was characterized by systematic looting and destruction of white owned businesses; Black owned businesses were noticeably spared, indicating a conscious desire by the rioters to express their resentment of those they felt responsible for their conditions. When the uprising finally concluded that Sunday, two people had been killed, and 100 policemen and 239 Black citizens were injured.\(^{63}\)

The 1964 Philadelphia riot was one of a series of similar uprisings that exploded in other northeastern cities during that same summer, including Harlem, and Rochester, New York, and Paterson, East Orange, and Jersey City, New Jersey. These uprisings demonstrated that the frustrations experienced by Blacks in North Philadelphia were not unique, but reflected a growing level of discontent.

\(^{62}\) Ibid.

\(^{63}\) Ibid.
among many urbanized Blacks in general. The series of riots in 1964 set the stage for the larger riot that erupted in Watts the next year, in 1965, and the major uprisings that swept other urban centers throughout the late 1960s. One scholar describes this period as a new era of “Black nationality formation” which ensued “from the migration of 4 million Black Americans from the South between 1940 and 1970 and the development of dozens of second ghettos,” which eventually generated hundreds of the urban uprisings during the 1960s. It was within the context of this heightened level of discontent and frustration—in Philadelphia and many other cities across the nation—that the Nation of Islam began to solidify its position as the premier Black Nationalist organization in America.\textsuperscript{64}

The uprising in North Philadelphia marked the decisive downfall of the tradition of “civil rights liberalism” that had held sway in the city since the World War II era. During the War years, African-American and white liberal activists, along with Democratic New Deal reformers, built a civil rights coalition that attempted to establish racial justice in the city through a rights-based legal and legislative strategy. Due to the onset of the Cold War, American liberals were “eager to demonstrate their commitment to racial equality to the colored peoples of the world.” Many Blacks benefited from the accomplishments of the civil rights liberals, particularly those who were educated, self-employed, or able to secure newly available positions in well-paying government or blue-collar jobs. During the 1950s, these Blacks were able to take advantage of the accessibility of “desegregated public accommodations and racially-integrating and/or

\textsuperscript{63} Adams and Bartelt, 83; Countryman, 301-310.
transitioning neighborhoods” such as Germantown and Mt. Airy. The majority of the city’s Blacks residents, however, “remained trapped in tenements in deteriorating neighborhoods, were unemployed or stuck in dead-end jobs, and watched their children continue to attend over-crowded, under-funded all-black neighborhood schools.” Many in this segment of the Black community became increasingly disillusioned with civil rights liberalism’s inability to address the “emerging crisis of Black poverty” and its failure to end institutionalized forms of “white racial privilege” in both the city’s public and private sectors. And by the 1960s, many activists adopted Black nationalist ideals in an effort to gain control over their own economic, political, educational, and social destiny.65

---

64 Woodard, 11.
CHAPTER 2

THE ASENDANCY OF THE NATION OF ISLAM IN PHILADELPHIA:
FROM INTEGRATIONISM TO NATIONALISM

“In the late sixties and early seventies, there was absolutely nothing I could find anywhere that could compare with the very broad institutional development Elijah Muhammad was doing. He was developing schools, businesses, banks, publishing companies, truck distribution centers, international trade, farmland—everything that everybody else was talking about, he was doing. All the nationalists and all the other groups, the Republic of New Afrika, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, even the civil rights organizations were talking about the need for the very structures and institutions Elijah Muhammad had in place....”

--Naim Akbar

By the late 1960s, the Nation of Islam began to establish its presence as a true contender among the various Black organizations and movements that were striving to solve the most pressing problems facing large numbers of poor and working-class Blacks. During this period, the local representatives of the Nation of Islam at Temple no.12 (later alternatively referred to as “Mosque” no.12) began to engage in an increased level of community activism and involvement with other Black organizations in the city. This was a marked shift from the local temple’s earlier policy, which focussed primarily on internal religious and administrative matters while rejecting relationships with outside groups.

65 Countryman, 6, 13-14, 126-128, 205.
There are several factors that apparently contributed to this shift in the Philadelphia temple’s operations. One important factor was the emergence of the Black Power movement out of the traditional civil rights movement that had prevailed in Philadelphia during and after World War II. During the postwar years of the 1940s and 1950s, Philadelphia was the scene of an active movement for racial reform that was committed to the philosophy of interracial cooperation and civil rights liberalism. By the 1960s and 1970s, however, the most prominent Black activists in Philadelphia began to shift to more nationalistic and militant forms of black protest, which promoted the “principles of intraracial unity, cultural distinctiveness, and political self-determination” and rejected earlier attachments to interracial liberalism. Particularly between 1967 and 1970, many community activists shifted from earlier integrationist goals and strategies, and began to adopt the more nationalistic ideals articulated by the Black Power advocates. With a distinct focus on the local concerns of Black poverty and economic development, the Black Power movement in Philadelphia “emerged as a strategic response to the inability of postwar liberalism to fulfill its promise of ending racial inequities in the urban North.” Philadelphia’s Black Power activists believed that traditional nationalistic strategies were the key to improving the quality of life in Black neighborhoods. Specifically, they believed that the Black community should control its own political, economic, educational and social institutions and that the leadership of poor Black communities should consist of the people who resided in those communities. Many believed that without Black control over their own communities, those communities would continue to
function as forms of internal "colonies" that were economically exploited, oppressed by a brutal police presence, and provided with inferior institutions such as the many overcrowded schools that failed to educate Black youth.⁶⁶

Even before the official advent of the Black Power movement and its popularization as a concept, there was already a high level of Black nationalist and militant sentiments expressed by key Black leaders and grassroots activists in Philadelphia during the early 1960s. First, there was the activism and the various programs established by the popular Reverend Leon Sullivan, beginning in the 1950s. In 1958, Sullivan organized the highly successful "Selective Patronage" campaign—a tacit boycott in which hundreds of Black ministers in the city, making heavy appeals to Black unity and pride, urged their congregations to withdraw economic support of businesses that did not hire Blacks. And although Sullivan did not consider himself a Black Nationalist, the institutions he established such as the Philadelphia Citizens Committee Against Juvenile Delinquency and its Causes and the Opportunities Industrial Center (OIC) clearly reflected his philosophy that African-Americans' immediate imperative was to establish Black social and economic self-sufficiency based on intraracial unity.⁶⁷

Another precursor to Black Power in Philadelphia was manifested in Cecil B. Moore's activism and rhetoric during his tenure as president of the local branch of the NAACP. During Cecil B. Moore's controversial reign as head of the Philadelphia NAACP, one of the largest branches in the country during that period, he rejected the traditional interracial coalitions, believing instead that

⁶⁶ Countryman, iv, 1-13, 465.
intraracial cooperation and solidarity would be of greater benefit to the city’s working-class and poor masses. Moore was also a supporter of Robert William’s espousal of armed self-defense. Although Moore’s stated objectives never deviated from the NAACP’s fundamental goals of institutional desegregation and civil rights, his Black-nationalist influenced discourse of racial solidarity, alienated many of the NAACP’s older, more conservative, middle-class members and magnified the intraracial class divisions that were a traditional undercurrent in the city’s Black community. While alienating many of the organization’s older members, however, Moore succeeded in attracting many new members from the city’s poor and working-class communities and effectively connected with the Black nationalist sentiments that were already latent in Philadelphia’s African-American populace.68

Finally, there was a resurgence of Black Nationalist and militant sentiments among various grassroots, community activists and student organizations in the city. First, the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), a militant, Black-nationalist student organization, was founded in Philadelphia by Max Stanford in 1962. Three years later in 1965, Philadelphia was the first northern city chosen by SNCC to sponsor a “full-fledged” community-organizing project in the form of the Philadelphia Freedom Organization (PFO), which was instituted to serve the Black working class as an alternative political party. This operation was initiated during the beginning stages of SNCC’s increased militancy and support for Black nationalistic ideas. In turn, John Churchville and

67 Sullivan, 24-30; Countryman, 133, 189, 191-195.
53
Bill Strickland of the Northern Student Movement founded the Black People’s Unity Movement (BPUM) in 1966 to serve as an all-Black political organization aspiring to unite all concerned Black Philadelphians across class and ideological divisions. The concept of this organization was inspired by the unity discourse propounded by Malcolm X during his last days and by the African Unity Movement in South Africa.\textsuperscript{69}

The nationalist ideology reached additional arenas. In 1964, John Churchville founded the Freedom Library in North Philadelphia. The Freedom Library was established to provide community residents with free lectures on Black history and culture in order to instill a positive Black identity and racial pride based on the many accomplishments of Black people. Churchville believed that a new birth in Black consciousness was needed before any true struggle for liberation or equality could advance successfully, and instituting this new consciousness was his primary objective. The Freedom Library was, therefore, modeled after SNCC’s Freedom Schools in the South, with the ultimate objective of creating political and social awareness among the local Black. Some of those attracted to these lectures were old Garveyites.\textsuperscript{70}

Clearly, during the years preceding the official articulation and popularization of the Black Power concept, Philadelphia was already experiencing a revival in many of the fundamental principles of Black economic, political, and cultural nationalism. Although manifestations of traditional Black Nationalism

\textsuperscript{68} Countryman, 216-228
\textsuperscript{69} ibid., 189-190, 414-423.
\textsuperscript{70} ibid., 393-402.
had declined during the ascendancy of civil rights liberalism in the 1940s and 1950s, by the 1960s, many Blacks in Philadelphia believed that the salvation of their communities lay in Black political, cultural, and economic solidarity. The Civil Rights Movement that was occurring in the South inspired many of these activists in Philadelphia. But these northern activists addressed their community’s problems within the context of the systemic structures of economic, political, educational, and residential inequality that were unique to the northern city. In order to alleviate the socioeconomic and political marginalization suffered by many of Philadelphia’s Black-working-class masses these northern activists perceived that racial solidarity—not appeals to interracial liberalism—would better serve their objectives.

The resurgence of Black Nationalist thought in Philadelphia coincided with the advent of Black Power, a national movement that was popularized by the SNCC activist, Stokely Carmichael. With the resurrection of Black Nationalist tendencies already producing an atmosphere favorable to the new Black Power concept, the movement received an extra boost in Philadelphia when the Third National Conference on Black Power was convened in the city for several days during August and September of 1968. Thousands of national delegates attended the conference and there was a broad and diverse range of support and participation from local Black activists, members of the clergy, and established organizations such as the NAACP and Urban League. The declared theme of the conference was, “Black Self-Determination and Black Unity through Direct Action,” and its stated agenda was to “deal with methods, techniques and
strategies to forge a Black nation in thought, experience and commitment” by:
1) unifying all Black brothers and sisters at all levels, particularly in the ghetto;
2) programming a series of methods and strategy for Black people to use in their communities; and 3) mobilizing Black people to resist the increasing genocidal tendencies of American society.

The explicit nationalistic ideas permeating the Black Power conference along with its success in attracting a cross-section of local leadership and community participation indicates that a significant level of support or empathy for the Black Power concept existed within Black Philadelphian. In fact, Dr. Nathan Wright, Chairman of the Continuations Committee of the National Conference, stated that “Philadelphia was chosen because of a warm invitation from that city’s Council of Black Clergy which had been strongly urged by large segments of the Black community to host the conference.”71 Most of the key ideas expressed at this conference were also compatible with the nationalistic principles that had long been advocated by the Nation of Islam—the most successful of the traditional Black nationalist groups after the Depression. Thus, it is certain that the conference added further vitality to the city’s increasingly nationalistic milieu, and helped produce an atmosphere in which many of the city’s Blacks would be more sympathetic to the Nation of Islam’s program.72

72 Some of the conferences workshops addressed such concerns as, “Black Economic Control of Black Communities; Developing a Black Press and Black Communications; Black Students in Black Schools and White Schools; Formation of a Black Militia; A Black Foreign Policy; and Fostering Black Unity at the International Level.” All of these concerns and issues were highly
A second major factor influencing the Nation of Islam’s increased activism and growth in Philadelphia occurred in 1965 with the arrival of Jeremiah X, a very capable minister who assumed leadership at the local mosque. Jeremiah X, described as an “eloquent and congenial” man, was noted for his strong organizing abilities and shrewd diplomatic skills. Jeremiah used these talents to capitalize on the Black community’s increasing shift towards “Black Power” and nationalist sentiments.\(^{73}\) Jeremiah’s strong diplomatic abilities proved to be a major asset for the Nation of Islam’s mosque in Philadelphia. A native of the city, Jeremiah helped Malcolm X establish the Nation of Islam’s Philadelphia mosque in 1954 before being assigned to lead the Atlanta mosque in 1959. Later, when explaining his own conversion and growth in the Nation of Islam, Jeremiah recounted:

> I was born in Philadelphia and raised in the Christian church. When fourteen, I heard the teachings of Islam from a barber who’d been imprisoned with some Muslim brothers down in Virginia. I’d heard about Muhammadanism, but the way this brother was talking, even though it was strange to me, it definitely had the ring of truth. By 1961, I was the Nation of Islam’s minister over the Deep South, which was Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Florida. And although I was headquartered in Atlanta, I moved back and forth like a circuit man from one town to the next.\(^{74}\)

While in the South, Jeremiah’s diplomatic skills were put to controversial use when the Nation of Islam elected him to negotiate land deals with the Ku Klux


Klan. But later, in the context of Philadelphia’s turbulent political scene, these same skills allowed Jeremiah to form a network of alliances through which he was able to secure a position for the Nation of Islam among the many community organizations that claimed to represent the interests of the city’s Blacks. Jeremiah’s shrewd diplomatic capability also proved impressive in the mid-1970s when the organization launched a major public relations campaign to counter negative press that linked certain members of the Philadelphia’s mosque to various criminal enterprises.

Jeremiah’s leadership style was also partly influenced by his association with John Churchville, the founder of the Freedom Library and co-founder of BPUM. In interviews with Matthew Countryman, Churchville explains that he had always had an affinity for Black Nationalism and began to frequent the Nation of Islam’s Harlem mosque after moving to New York in 1961 to pursue a Jazz career. Although he never formally joined the Nation of Islam, Churchville continued to support the movement even after going to college and eventually joining both the Northern Student Movement and SNCC. Later, while working with SNCC in the South, Churchville cultivated a strong relationship with Jeremiah X, who at that time was the minister of the Atlanta mosque. Jeremiah and the Atlanta mosque were experiencing tense relations with Atlanta's Black Christian churches and ministers, and the mosque’s connection with the city’s general Black community was also poor. Using the skills honed at SNCC, Churchville began to teach classes on “community organizing skills and

strategies" to members of the Atlanta mosque. Churchville insisted that the mosque should not focus their efforts on converting everyone to the Nation of Islam, but on gaining the community’s overall support and respect. The success of the strategy was described to Countryman:

A centerpiece of the Atlanta mosque’s campaign to improve its public image was a Black Unity Day rally it organized in early 1964 in an attempt to reach out to “preachers and other people who had real problems with Muslims.” Modeled on the African Unity Movement in South Africa, a [B]lack-only rival to Nelson Mandela’s African National Congress, Churchville remembers the unity rally having “a tremendous impact.” I enabled Jeremiah X to be “in the mix as opposed to [being] separated” without compromising the minister’s commitment to [B]lack nationalist principles. “He could still give the strong line. We got to the place where the Muslims stopped being a pariah in Atlanta and they were people to be looked to whether they agreed or disagreed.”

At that time, the Nation of Islam’s national headquarters did not recognize the value in these impressive “outreach efforts” conducted by the Atlanta mosque and ordered that the campaign be discontinued. But they undoubtedly benefited Jeremiah. It is apparent from Jeremiah’s later activities in his hometown of Philadelphia that he revived the same tactics that were refined earlier in Atlanta.

Beginning immediately, almost from the outset of Jeremiah X’s tenure as minister, Philadelphia’s Temple No. 12 began to participate in activities and programs that included or were sponsored by other Black organizations, indicating a shift in policy from the mosque’s earlier extremes of parochialism and aloofness. In the summer of 1967, Jeremiah and Temple No. 12 joined other local activists in a series of street-corner protest rallies that were called by Cecil

---

1992), 117,118,128.
76 Countryman, 391-393.
B. Moore, the controversial president of the local NAACP. The protests were aimed at drawing attention to the rampant police brutality that prevailed in Philadelphia's Black communities during the tenure of Commissioner Frank Rizzo. During Rizzo's reign as police commissioner in the late 1960s, and later as the city's mayor in the 1970s, the plague of police brutality was a major problem in Philadelphia's Black neighborhoods. By participating and being visible in activities such as these rallies against police brutality, Jeremiah X increased the Muslim's relevancy by connecting with issues of immediate concern to many in the city's Black community. This increased participation also indicates that Jeremiah was aspiring to secure a more activist role for the local mosque in order to strengthen the Nation of Islam's presence among the various Black organizations and movements claiming to represent the Black community's interests.\(^77\)

Throughout the late 1960s, Minister Jeremiah X's visibility among the city's Black leadership continued to grow. In the spring of 1968, he was appointed to the board of a new organization in Philadelphia called the Black Coalition. The Black Coalition was formed in response to the violent upheaval that had erupted in many Black communities following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Recognizing the high level of discontent and grievances among the most impoverished and marginalized residents of Philadelphia's ghettos, members of the city's business community sought to address some of

the local social ills similar to those that they believed had sparked massive riots in other cities. These businesspersons hoped to prevent the recurrence of a local riot, like the one that devastated North Philadelphia in 1964. Meeting with the city’s leading Black activists, business leaders pledged one million dollars for the creation of an organization that would work towards the economic and cultural advancement of city’s impoverished communities. A diverse coalition, consisting of a board of what was considered fifteen “moderate” and “militant” Black leaders, including Jeremiah X, directed the organization. Celebrating this new association, an article in the Philadelphia Tribune—the city’s leading Black newspaper—proclaimed, “The Black Coalition, an organization with a million dollars and comprised of a powerhouse of Black leadership in Philadelphia, have [sic] declared war on the major problems in the local Black community.” Actually, the organization merely duplicated other antipoverty programs that were already operating in the city, and although the Black Coalition only lasted a year before it disintegrated, it allowed Jeremiah X to mingle with other Black activists and further the Nation of Islam’s visibility.

As Minister Jeremiah X continued to establish the Nation of Islam’s presence in Philadelphia, the movement’s popularity along with that of other nationalistic and “militant” organizations began to increase in segments of the Black community, especially among younger Blacks. Since younger Blacks are often the primary proselytes during the rise of new and/or non-traditional Black

---

78 See, Matthew J. Countryman, 592-600.
organizations, an examination of their role during this period of ideological transition is important. The local Black media during that time suggests that many in the Black community believed that an ideological rift was developing between the generations. While the philosophy of civil rights liberalism and nonviolence formerly held sway among earlier activists, younger Blacks seemed attracted primarily to the Black Power ideals and the growing militancy. This development was of grave concern to some of the more conservative members of the Black community, especially after the series of massively destructive race riots erupted in various cities during the latter half of the 1960s. Beginning in the latter half of 1967 and continuing in 1968, the question of “Black Power”—its definition, supposed constituents and supporters, and purported link to the outbreaks of riots—was a leading topic of debate in a series of articles submitted by various leaders and featured in the Philadelphia Tribune. Many concerned persons in the Black community, and the general public, interpreted the idea of “Black Power,” not as a new manifestation of traditional African-American dreams of nationalism and desire for self-determination, but as a form of militancy that was chiefly concerned with promoting violence and alienating sympathetic whites. And although the Nation of Islam had not been implicated in any specific acts of violence against whites or of starting any of the riots, the sect was lumped in an amorphous category of so-called militant groups promoting violent “Black Power.” It must be noted, however, that the initial hysteria,

---

80 The term “militant” appears to have been used to designate any person or group that engaged in aggressive forms of protest, or that used hostile sounding rhetoric, regardless of the actual ideology of the person or group.
confusion, and negative misinformation concerning Black Power gradually
dissipated as the true philosophy of the concept was articulated by many of its
advocates—especially after the 1968 Black Power conference was held in the

In the winter of 1968, the influence of the Nation of Islam on Black youth
resulted in controversy when Jeremiah X was invited by a group of student
leaders to give a speech at Germantown High School. The school had recently
experienced race-related violence, and the minister’s appearance caused a furor
among the parents of the school’s white students who made up 25 percent of the
overall student body. The parents castigated the school’s principal, Samuel P.
Beard, for allowing a “Black Muslim” minister to preach his doctrine of “Black
superiority.” Beard denied that he had given the students permission to invite
Jeremiah, claiming that Jeremiah’s appearance was “a carefully arranged and
neatly timed trick” arranged by the student leaders without the administration’s
knowledge. The student leaders, however, maintained that they had received
Beard’s permission to invite Jeremiah for the school’s celebration of “Negro
History Week.” Although the controversy led Principal Beard to cancel the
remainder of the school’s Negro History Week celebrations, the incident
highlighted the Nation of Islam’s growing appeal to young Blacks in Philadelphia.\textsuperscript{82}

The Nation of Islam’s growing presence in Philadelphia, along with its increasing appeal to Black youth, reflects the increased popularity of nationalist sentiments during the Black Power era. Matthew Countryman effectively argues that the Black Power movement prevailed because of liberalism’s failure to address the immediate concerns of this urbanized Black community—such as persistent poverty, residential and economic discrimination, inferior schools, police brutality, and other such problems. Thus, the Black Power movement in Philadelphia was based on a rational attempt by many Blacks to “develop ideological and strategic alternatives to the increasingly obvious limitations of liberalism’s civil rights agenda.” The resulting activism produced a wide variety of new, local movements such as RAM, the Black Panthers, the Black People’s Unity Movement, the Black Coalition, the Black Economic Development Conference, the Black Political Forum, the Philadelphia Freedom Organization, the Young Militants, and various neighborhood-based organizations and movements. Philadelphia’s Black Power movement also led to a substantial decentralization and “democratization” of local leadership, decreasing the emphasis on the traditional, leadership class of professional elites, while increasing the importance of grassroots, working-class community-based leaders, including many Black women.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{83} See, Countryman, \textit{Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia, 1940-1971}. 64
Despite the prevailing enthusiasm for Black Power that had existed in Philadelphia, Countryman concludes that the movement only gained “short-term” victories that were eventually eroded by the city’s Democratic political machine. By the beginning of the 1970s, Black Power activists began to shift their efforts from concerns of economic and institutional empowerment to mainstream electoral politics in order to elect Black politicians who would represent their community’s concerns. Countryman contends, however, that despite the significant gains made by African Americans in local politics during the 1970s, these “Black Power” politicians “increasingly sought to substitute racial pride in their own career advancement for the substantive economic goals that had originally fueled Black Power’s break from civil rights liberalism.” Countryman argues that this shift from the earlier 1960s’ quest for economic empowerment, institutional autonomy, and political sovereignty, to the mainstream, electoral tactics of traditional politics, represented the death of the Black Power movement. Although Countryman acknowledges Black Power’s continued legacy in local organizations such as MOVE, the Heritage theater and the Opportunities Industrial Center, he failed to make the connection between Black Power’s legacy and the Nation of Islam’s subsequent growth and popularity in Philadelphia during the 1970s.  

During the 1970s, the Nation of Islam became a leading advocate and representative of many of the Black Power ideals that had been so popular during the 1960s. In this new decade, in which many Black Power groups were either

---

84 Ibid., 634, 635, 644, 645.
debilitated or “neutralized,” the Nation of Islam was the premier organization in
the city promoting the ideals of Black self-determination and empowerment.

With less competition from other movements that were more prevalent during
Black Power’s ascendancy in the 1960s, the Nation of Islam was able to promote
its own program as an authentic alternative for those who were still committed to
Black economic empowerment and institutional autonomy. During the 1970s,
Philadelphia’s local mosque of the Nation of Islam, Temple No. 12, embarked on
a vigorous public relations campaign that solidified its position as the city’s
preeminent Black nationalist organization. During the early 1970s, where
Countryman places Black Power’s decline, the Nation of Islam experienced its
most rapid growth and highest level of visibility ever in the city of Philadelphia. ⁸⁵

Under the leadership of Minister Jeremiah X, whose surname was changed
to “Shabazz” in the 1970s, the Philadelphia mosque became one of the largest,
and some would assert the strongest, in the country by 1975. Other than the
Nation of Islam’s national headquarters, Temple No. 2 in Chicago, only New
York’s Temple No. 7 was in the same league as Philadelphia’s Temple No. 12.
By 1974, Philadelphia’s Temple No. 12 was certainly the top mosque in terms of
its weekly numbers of new visitors and sales of Muhammad Speaks—the Nation

⁸⁵ Although there are no membership rolls available to determine the actual number of
Philadelphians that joined the Nation of Islam, indirect evidence—including actual statements
made in the Muslim’s national newspaper, Muhammad Speaks, and the estimations of independent
observers and local media such as the Philadelphia Tribune, the Philadelphia Daily News, and the
Philadelphia Inquirer—indicate that Temple No. 12 experienced rapid growth and activity during
the early 1970s, particularly by 1974. See, “Philadelphia Temple Attracting Huge Numbers,”
Muhammad Speaks 18 April 1975; “Jeremiah Shabazz Suspended by Muslims,” Philadelphia
Tribune 10 February 1976; “Philadelphia Mosque Maligned, Says Muslim Aide,” Philadelphia
of Islam’s newspaper. Temple No. 12 consistently sold an average of over 100,000 copies of *Muhammad Speaks* per week, which was significantly more than any other city, including New York and Chicago. During this period, the Philadelphia Muslims also established a Department of Community Relations and local television and radio shows to proselytize and promote their programs and businesses. By the mid-1970s, *Muhammad Speaks* often highlighted the work of the Philadelphia Muslims in feature articles that praised Temple No. 12’s achievements. The Nation of Islam’s national leadership also recognized the importance of the Philadelphia mosque by visiting and speaking there often. The Muslims of Temple No. 12 had established a recognized position among the city’s various Black organizations.  

This growth of the Nation of Islam in Philadelphia, can most assuredly be attributed to the organization’s success in propagandizing, promoting, and publicizing its program of economic self-sufficiency and institutional independence through local Black media and its own independent media. Even though the local mosque experienced some bad publicity due to accusations that certain members were associated with an organized crime syndicate called, “the Black Mafia,” Temple No. 12 prospered during the 1970s. As stated earlier, by the late 1960s and 1970s, a significant segment of Philadelphia’s Blacks were much more predisposed to Black nationalist ideas than to the civil rights liberalism that had prevailed in earlier years. And there was a major concern with

---

attaining economic power and alleviating the conditions of poverty prevailing in many Black neighborhoods. One of the fundamental tenets that the local Muslims constantly expounded was that “Black people should be independent, able to provide for their own needs of food clothing and shelter” and that they must create employment for themselves. This rhetoric struck a positive cord among many Blacks who supported these ideas of Black economic empowerment.

In the 1970s, Jeremiah Shabazz and Temple No. 12 addressed this concern by sponsoring an annual “Black Economic Development Bazaar,” which provided a showcase of the goods and services offered by the Black business community in the city. The Muslims’ 1974 Black Economy Bazaar, held at St. Joseph’s College, was attended by 32,500 people over a two-day period, and the 1975 bazaar attracted over 35,000. Special guests included the boxer Muhammad Ali and popular singing groups Harold Melvin & The Bluenotes and the Delfonics were employed to attract a broader segment of the city’s Black community. Popular Black politicians, including Pennsylvania State Representative David Richardson and Clerk of Quarter Sessions Court Edward Lee, the highest elected Black official in Philadelphia, also attended the event. The bazaars were used to publicize the Muslim’s own economic program and their businesses that were already expanding rapidly in Philadelphia. By grasping the opportunity to preach its message of economic empowerment to the thousands of Black people that visited the Bazaars, the Nation of Islam successfully reached a broad segment of
Philadelphia's Black populace. By the summer of 1974, the Muslims' highly publicized economic endeavors garnered the respect and admiration of the general Black community, and inspired one observer to declare,

Now, in every section of Philadelphia, one can see Muslim-owned businesses of nearly every description: fish import sales, bakeries, grocery stores, construction companies, barber shops, beauty salons, variety stores, health food stores, steak n' takes, real estate agencies, furniture stores, shoe stores and TV repair shops.

The Nation of Islam's message also addressed the Black community's desire to control essential community institutions, such as the public schools, which many Blacks charged with failing to provide an adequate education to Black students. Because of geographical segregation and the flight of whites into private schools, most of the public schools increasingly had predominantly Black students with curricula and administrations controlled by whites. As articulated at the Black Power conference held in the city in 1968, a chief desire of many was Black control of community schools. The Muslims' continuous promotion of its University of Islam (the Muslim's primary and secondary school) alerted the Black community to the school's presence and activities, and provided many with a concrete example of the type of institutional self-sufficiency that they longed for. The Muslims' school was an alternative to the public school system and demonstrated that Black run schools were a clear option. An instance of this perception is revealed in a 1972 Tribune interview in which a 35 year-old Black woman, when asked what was the hardest thing about raising kids, replied:

I have two boys, 2 ½ and 14 ½, and I’d say the main problem is getting them educated properly. I have solved the problem by sending them to a Muslim school, where they get a better education than in the public schools. It also erases other problems like the gangs. They learn the same basics such as reading and writing, but they are taught by Black teachers, and they learn about Black people.⁹⁰

The Muslim’s also stated that the proceeds from their annual economic bazaars went to the expansion of their school in Philadelphia.

During the summer of 1974, the Philadelphia mosque’s public relations campaign was conducted so assiduously, that the organization, was able to partially mollify the negative image that had arisen due to certain members’ association with a criminal element known as “the Black Mafia.” After the highly successful 1974 economic bazaar, Darryl X Johnson, a Muslim journalist, was even able to secure a position at the Philadelphia Tribune, which allowed him to write columns describing the program of the Nation of Islam and its activities in the Philadelphia area. Johnson’s articles, providing information concerning the Muslim’s schools, businesses, prison ministry, and other such programs were well publicized in the city’s major Black newspaper throughout that year. Then in August of 1974, the Philadelphia Muslims established their Department of Community Affairs, a professionally staffed department that provided information concerning the Nation of Islam to community groups and individuals. The department’s stated purpose was to keep the Black community informed on the Muslim’s “many services and activities” by providing “speakers, films, one-to-one consultations and classroom sessions for community members and groups

⁹⁰ See, Countryman, Ch.7.
desiring such assistance.” The most important accomplishment, however, was that the Muslim’s Department of Community Affairs eventually obtained a weekly television show that aired every Saturday morning at 10 a.m. 

The Muslim’s television program was the key to the Philadelphia mosque’s eventual success in improving its image and gaining broad support throughout significant segment of Philadelphia’s Black community. In an interview in the Muslims’ own national newspaper, the moderator/producer for the television program in Philadelphia explained, “We use communications to make people receptive to Islam. They see thousands attending the Temple, they see the progressive involvement of the Nation of Islam in the community before they even visit the Temple.” The television station’s manager asserted that the show, entitled—“Muhammad Speaks to Philadelphia,” “has definitely generated broader acceptance for the Muslims.” Several weeks after the show’s debut, the Philadelphia Tribune conducted a random people’s poll to get a sample of the Black community’s response to the program. The recorded responses were primarily positive. Isaac Williams, a welder and father of four children from West Philadelphia, stated, “I missed the first show. But I heard about it on the news and watched the last two. What Minister Shabazz was saying makes a lot of sense to me. Unemployment and crime are getting worse.” Ida Harris, a mother of two from North Philadelphia replied, “I agree with some of what the Muslims are saying, but there is a lot I definitely don’t agree with. I’m going to keep

watching the program, though, because they are trying to help our people.”

Thomas Johnson, a graduate student in Secondary Education declared, “The program is good. I was sort of negative about the Muslims until a brother selling the paper (Muhammad Speaks) got me to watch the show. It’s good to hear the Muslim side on the issues of today since everybody else has had their chance.”

And Cora Mason, a retired senior citizen from South Philadelphia answered, “I didn’t know that the Muslims were doing so much in business and education throughout the country until I watched the TV program. Now that I understand more about what Mr. Muhammad (Elijah) is really teaching, I plan to visit one of his Temples.”

Throughout 1974, the Muslim’s television program continued to draw favorable responses from many in the Black community.

The popularity of the Muslim’s television program in Philadelphia resulted in tangible benefits to the organization in the form of larger mosque attendance, greater community support, and increased sales of their newspaper Muhammad Speaks. Throughout 1974 and 1975, the Philadelphia mosque sold more copies (between 100,000-125,000 weekly) than any other mosque in the nation. The sharp increase in the organization’s newspaper sales resulted in a sharp increase in attendance at the mosque. In an interview in Muhammad Speaks, one Philadelphia Muslim observed, “During the past year, so many Blacks have been attending the Orientation classes, that Temple (mosque) officials have had to expand into a second building to accommodate the increased volume.”

And a local distribution manager of the Muslim’s newspaper asserted

---

that “the increased market for newspaper sales reflects a growing influence of the Nation of Islam among Philadelphia Blacks.” One commentator suggested that the Muslims public relations drive had been such a triumph, that Philadelphia’s Blacks were beginning to identify with the so-called “Muslim image” or style, stating, “Predominantly, the appearance of Black Philadelphians includes the close well groomed, distinctively Muslim hairstyle and the fashionable but conservative dress identified with members of the Nation of Islam.”

But whether or not these characterizations were exaggerated, by 1976, Temple number 12 was described as the “strongest mosque in the country” by Minister Louis Farrakhan, the Nation of Islam’s national spokesman at that time.

An apparent increase in conversions among young Blacks to Islam during this period was a great source of concern for some Black church members. The perception induced the Philadelphia Tribune to print a series of articles addressing the phenomenon. In one of the feature articles, the journalist mentioned one woman who inquired as to whether “our Christian ministers are aware of the many young Black men leaving the church in favor of the Muslim philosophy?” The woman wondered whether “the contemporary Christian churches” were becoming “bastions of jazzed-up gospel for the very old and very young only.” One pastor answered, “I can see what’s happening. The church doesn’t give mature thinkers the opportunity to think. The church is ‘establishment’ to young people. The Muslims attract people because of the self-

interest of their faith where the traditional Christian church is not heavy on that.”
Reverend Herman D. Frank, a Christian Methodist Episcopal pastor responded
that no young people had left his church, however being a teacher at a Junior High
School he “comes in contact with many youths who have left the ranks of
Christianity.” Frank stated that, “The Nation of Islam has offered them (young
people) something that doesn’t exist in established churches they tell me. . . . I
have never challenged their way of thinking because I believe people deserve the
right to worship where they are happy. But the program of the Black church is on
solid ground. Young people have a need for a new environment and that’s why
they leave.” 96

Another pastor explained that, “there is no one thing in particular to hold a
young person to the church because nothing is specifically geared to do so. As for
his opinion of young Muslims, the pastor responded that his experiences range
from “‘the hostile dude on the corner’ who looks at me and says ‘here comes a
devil’ to kind Muslim families who I know personally and like.” 97 Jeremiah
Shabazz’s opinion on the matter was that, “Many Christian ministers preach about
the hereafter and never encourage their flock to try to get some of the economic
goodies here on Earth.” 98 In support of the economic view propounded by
Shabazz, in a letter to the editor, one concerned citizen summed up the issue:

---

95 Lorraine Branham, “Philadephia Mosque Maligned, Says Muslim Aide,” Philadelphia Tribune
30 March 1976.
96 Paula Bennet, “Are Muslims or White Churches More Attractive to Young Blacks,”
97 Paul A. Bennet, “Youths Need Responsibilities, Chances to Lead,” Philadelphia Tribune 31
January 1976.
98 “BEDC Links Judge’s Aide to Dope Ring,” Philadelphia Tribune 13 April 1974.
74
Is the Black Church Relevant to Black Americans? Not with the power that each pastor has in his relationship to his membership in his church, be it 200 or 10,000 members to the membership. With all pastors directing one way that’s real power. Black churches could have done more politically to advance the economic needs of their congregations. Generally, our pastor marries us, blesses any children born of this marriage, gives us spiritual aid during sicknesses and buries us upon our death. But so often our educational, political and economical needs are not a function of Black churches. Why? In over 50 years, I don’t understand. If we are to be guided, then guide us all the way. . . . Black churches haven’t done their part for our children to keep them in our churches economically, politically and socially. I’ve so often said God wants us to help ourselves and our churches would have more to gain in keeping our children in our churches. 99

Such views were not new, and had been increasingly expressed since the late 1960s.

Some Christian ministers questioned their effectiveness themselves. In a 1969 letter, Rev. Ralph L. Greene of the Church of God & Saints in nearby Camden, New Jersey bemoaned,

These are troubled and troubling times and why are the ministers and the churches so silent? The young are at a loss today as to the relevance of the church and its mission in the world. A church and its ministers that limits its service to its members only is a self-centered and failing church. The churches in our [B]lack community are praying—shouting—singing and keeping their religion within the four walls of their sanctuary, while the community all around them are suffering economic and social injustice from the city administration. There is a real big problem when our young people have lost faith and trust in the ministry of our city. They feel that the Black Minister has sold out to the Political force as they put it they are “hung up and can’t be trusted.” I must agree that the churches and its true mission has failed. . . . I say to all the young in our city, you have a right to be angry and frustrated when the city administration will not listen and the minister and the church will not listen and the adult living in our community won’t listen and then be judged as a hoodlum because of your long hair and beard or clothing. But with all of

this I pray that you will give us your support to help us correct our failure so that the voice of the church can be heard.  

Similarly, during the period when the crime rate was beginning to skyrocket in 1969 and 1970, editorials in the Tribune exhorted the church to become more involved, opining that “Ministers Must Do More Than Preach on Sunday” and that “Churches and Ministers Should Take Leadership In Fight Against Crime.”

The paper published its position stating:

The most powerful institution owned and controlled by Negroes is the Christian Church. The combined strength of our ministers of the Gospel, if intelligently used, can destroy much of the poverty and injustices suffered by members of their racial group. . . . We believe that our churches should now take the leadership in reducing the excessively high number of violent crimes being committed by Negroes. . . . The only group which has the power to reduce gang killings is our churches, under the leadership of devout men of God who can appeal directly to their members. The use of dope is rapidly becoming a way of life for too many young boys and girls. Its use is responsible for many of the crimes of violence. . . . To stop this vicious traffic requires the full-hearted support of our church leadership. They must combine their efforts in a tremendous all-out fight to put gangsters and dope pushers out of business. It can and will be done if the full power of our combined church leadership attacks it and refuses to stop hitting hard until it becomes impossible to make an illegal purchase of narcotics.  

Although there might certainly have been a significant number of churches that fit the description of that described by the critics, some of this widespread perception can possibly be attributed to the overwhelming nature of the social problems that were beginning to plague many Black neighborhoods in the city. For during this period, there were a worthy number of progressive leaders

---


76
represented in Philadelphia’s Black church community. Reverend Leon H. Sullivan of Zion Baptist Church had developed a national reputation for the extensive community programs that his church had pioneered in Philadelphia. And in 1968, it was Philadelphia’s Council of Black Clergy that participated in, and was responsible for convening, the third National Conference on Black Power that was held in the city that year. The 1969 conference was actually convened at the facilities of Father Paul Washington’s Church of the Advocate. But because of the tide of social change erupting in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a general atmosphere was produced in which many Blacks were inspired to seek the leadership of newer, alternative institutions—those specifically formed to address the unique issues and circumstances of urban existence. Organizations such as the Black Panther Party, and during the mid-1970s, the Nation of Islam, proselytized more aggressively, propagated more effectively, connected with the frustrations of those in many inner-city communities, and offered programs that appealed to many of the Black youth in the city.

Providing insight into the causes of this diminished image of Christianity among many Black youth during the period, theologian Mark L. Chapman observes:

Whereas pre-Black Power religious leaders attempted to make Christianity relevant for a generation of young people fighting racial segregation in the South, post-Black Power ministers and theologians in the 1960s and 1970s faced the challenge of making the gospel speak to the frustrations of Black youth fighting institutional racism, joblessness, and police brutality in the Urban North. In this latter period, African Americans were more

conscious of the fact that racism was supported by deep structural and economic roots; consequently, the younger generation changed its focus from integration and civil rights to a new emphasis on Black nationalism and self-determination. If the Black church and its theologians could not answer Elijah Muhammad’s claim that “Christianity is the white man’s religion,” then they wanted no part of it.  

Jeremiah Shabazz’s tenure as local minister of the Nation of Islam’s Temple number 12 in Philadelphia between 1967 to 1975 saw the organization attract increased attention as a result promoting its activities in the local Black newspapers, its own newspaper, the weekly television program, and the mass economic bazaars that the Muslim presence in Philadelphia had expanded significantly. Although there were actually, small, orthodox, African-American Islamic sects in Philadelphia since the 1960s, the “proto-Islamic” Nation of Islam was clearly the dominant model of Islam in the consciences of the larger Black community. Because of the controversy stemming from the connection of some members to criminal activities, the reputation of the Philadelphia mosque, along with its leader, Jeremiah Shabazz was permanently stained to a degree. But by addressing the immediate economic, social, and philosophical concerns of the city’s Blacks, in the context of their mid-twentieth-century urban reality, the Nation of Islam successfully attracted elements of Philadelphia’s Black populace that had not been reached by the traditional institutions. Consequently, by the time of Elijah Muhammad’s death in 1975, the concept of “Islam” was well-established in Philadelphia’s Black communities.

102 Chapman, 5.
CHAPTER 3

CHARGES AND COUNTERCHARGES: 
THE INTERNAL STRUGGLES OF A GROWING MOVEMENT

In spite of the apparent achievements and increased popularity of the Nation of Islam in Philadelphia, during its height in the 1970s the Philadelphia mosque was continuously challenged by a succession of controversial episodes that sullied it’s hard-earned image. During this period of unprecedented growth and major efforts to attain respectability as a legitimate community institution, the mosque was dogged by suspicions and accusations that it was a “center of criminal activity, with many of its leaders connected to murder, extortion, drug dealing, bank fraud and other crimes.” Critics charged that Temple No. 12 was linked to a Philadelphia-based organized crime syndicate known as the “Black Mafia,” which was purportedly founded by several young men who were members of the local mosque. The alleged connection of these men to Temple No. 12 caused the Philadelphia mosque to develop a national reputation and designation as the “Killer Mosque” or the “Hoodlum Mosque.” On the local level, the bad reputation garnered from this negative publicity presented a major

---

103 Orthodox sects such as the “Darul-Islamic movement had been in Philadelphia since the early 1960s. The Nation of Islam however, defined as a “pseudo-Islamic” organization, was clearly the dominant of these various sects.
dilemma to Jeremiah Shabazz's efforts to gain mainstream acceptance and respectability. On a national level, the contradictory accounts of excellence and iniquity among the Philadelphia's Muslims caused Temple No. 12 to symbolize both a prouder example and an embarrassment to the movement's national leadership. Only a highly efficient public relations campaign, utilizing available forms of Black outlets, would mitigate this negative image. The efforts highlight Jeremiah Shabazz's diplomatic talents.105

To understand some of the problems that plagued the Philadelphia mosque, it is necessary to analyze them in the context of the larger local, as well as national, social climate in which the mosque operated. During the years of transition from the late 1960s into the early 1970s, Black Philadelphia was beset by a scourge of violent crime that was the result of escalating violence between young street gangs and the onset of an epidemic of heroin trafficking and addiction. As shown by historian V.P. Franklin, the phenomenon of gang warfare was not new in Philadelphia, but had long been a problem beginning "as early as the 1920s" and was "the bane" of working-class areas in the 1930s and 1940s.106 But the gang warfare of the 1960s differed from these early periods in that it reached a crisis level of unprecedented violence and pervasiveness. By the end of

106 It must be noted that although the problem of Black street gangs reached a crisis level during the late 1960s and the 1970s, street gangs have a long history in Philadelphia and were originally more prevalent among ethnic whites than among African-Americans. In his study of early crime in Philadelphia, Roger Lane documents the existence of white street gangs in Philadelphia as far back as the mid-1800s. See, Roger Lane, Roots of Violence in Black Philadelphia, 1860-1900 (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986), 9,10,18,19; V.P. Franklin, "Operation Street Corner: The Wharton Centre and the Juvenile Gang Problem in Philadelphia, 1945-1958," in W.E.B. DuBois,
1968, Philadelphia’s gang murder rate had mushroomed by 600 percent over the 1967 total. The violence between young, Black gang members was so severe that Philadelphia acquired a national reputation as the “gang-killing capital of the world,” and Philadelphia’s youth purportedly had the highest arrest rate in the nation by 1969. Between 1965 and 1970, drug arrests increased in the city by 500 percent, and during the first nine months of 1970, the city’s overall murder rate increased by over 40 percent. The problems of gangs, drugs, and violent crime became the most pressing issues of concern for many in Philadelphia’s Black community, dominating the topics of editorials and letters in the city’s leading Black publications. There was little solace to be found in the local police department, which had become infamous for its own brutality and corruption, and was itself under investigation for involvement in narcotics and for receiving payoffs from organized crime groups. It was in the context of this deteriorating social environment that the local mosque began to experience its own problems with crime.107

---

This rising crime rate in Philadelphia was a magnified reflection of a trend that was occurring nationally. Although the period between 1946 and 1964 was relatively calm, demographic and economic changes that occurred in the United States after World War II contributed to a dramatic upsurge in violent crime on a national level between the years of 1964 and 1975. The onset of deindustrialization, along with this rise of a large, new generation of “baby boomer” youth, was a combustible combination. Studies on the history of crime in America concur that young males of all races have always committed the bulk of the nation’s violent crime, and crime rates are often influenced by the proportions of young males—between the ages of 15 to 25—in a given demographic area. Because of the migration and postwar baby boom, the proportion of young Blacks in Philadelphia shot up to its highest level in the 1960s, during a period in which unemployment was also escalating. With a large population of Black youth, disproportionately excluded from the workforce, the demographic and social ingredients contributed to a rise in crime. Accordingly, 1960 became the first year that homicide was the leading cause of death for young Black men in Philadelphia, and the homicide rates for African-American males between the ages of fifteen to nineteen were three times as high in the early 1970s as in the late 1950s.\footnote{See, Wesley G. Skogan, “Crime in Contemporary America” in \textit{Violence in America: Historical and Comparative Perspectives} revised ed. Hugh D. Graham and Ted R. Gurr (Beverly Hills: Sage}
predominantly from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds. This was the exact population group most at-risk to the temptations of criminal activity, and traditionally, the Nation of Islam had especially targeted the Black community’s most dispossessed members, those belonging what is now commonly referred to as the “underclass.” By the 1960s, the Nation of Islam had gained wide recognition and distinction for its success in rehabilitating such persons and transforming them into productive, law-abiding citizens. There had always been a tradition of Black leaders and organizations in Philadelphia working to solve the problem of crime and juvenile delinquency. In fact, the first mission that the Rev. Leon Sullivan embarked on when he first came to Philadelphia in the 1950s was a campaign to end crime and violence among Black youth, founding the Citizens Committee Against Juvenile Delinquency and its Causes in 1953. In 1965, Cecil B. Moore actively recruited young men from North Philadelphia’s street gangs to participate in the NAACP’s street demonstrations, producing a new corps of “young militants” and providing them with a “constructive means for expressing their anger at a racist society.” And so in the context of Philadelphia’s crime wave during the 1960s and 1970s, many of those attracted to the Nation of Islam—former delinquents, especially gang members would have been the conscious targets of the Muslims for salvaging.109

Some commentators hypothesize that during the early 1970s, certain of the young converts in the Philadelphia mosque reverted to illegal activities and were

---

109 Lincoln, 24-27; Countryman, 355, 356; Sullivan, 63.
ultimately responsible for the various crime scandals associated with Temple No.

12. One Black law enforcement agent thought the problem stemmed from the Nation of Islam’s heavy recruitment in the jails, stating: “These people come out of jail and if their criminal tendencies return they’re a pretty tough group to control. The Muslim leadership is unable to control them.” Yet, considering the stringent code of conduct and the high level of discipline that was required by members of the Nation of Islam, the notion that certain Muslims engaging in unrestricted, illicit activities seems contradictory. But during the height of the Muslim’s crime problems in Philadelphia and several other cities, the controversy became a question of public speculation.

In 1973, a feature-expose’ in the New York Times argued that the rising crime problem in the Nation of Islam stemmed from financial problems that the national organization was experiencing. In this article, journalist Paul Delaney first commended the Muslim’s “example of industry, competence, and self-help” as something that “the entire Black community should emulate.” Delaney also acknowledged that the “Muslims seemed to succeed where others had failed, such as in their rehabilitation of “ex-convicts and drug addicts,” and in “establishing businesses controlled by Blacks;” however, Delaney contended that something was beginning to go awry:

[T]oday, the Nation of Islam is in deep trouble, reeling from financial difficulties and a change in direction that has led some followers back into the life of crime from which many of them were recruited. What once appeared to be a thriving business empire . . . is in jeopardy of crumbling for lack of cash flow and

---

technical and managerial skills, and the changing nature of American business. With the need for money, some members of the sect have turned to one of the biggest and best sources of ready cash in the ghetto—crime. Sources close to the Muslims reported grave concern within and outside the Muslim organization over the turn to crime some Muslims, particularly in the East have taken.

Relying on unnamed sources, Delaney contended that the manifestations of crime among “Black Muslims” in New York, New Jersey, and especially Philadelphia could be attributed to their businesses not making money and a lot of ex-criminals returning to their “old ways.” Concerning Temple No. 12, Delaney said, “Philadelphia has a history of gangs, so it was rather easy for the gang members to take on the trappings of the religion, change their names and keep operating as they had.” He then quoted a police source who asserted that a number of known gang members “who dropped out of sight in Philadelphia had turned up in the Black Muslims.” Qualifying these remarks to an extent, the article also quotes Edward L. Kerr, director of the Newark Police Department, who cautioned that “most Muslims appeared to be true believers who lived according to the faith” and that “only a small number participated in crime.” Other unnamed sources stated that “some mosques were split into conservative and militant factions, with some younger, more militant members engaging in crime.”

The last assertion alludes to an apparent generation gap that had developed by the early 1970s. During those years, Elijah Muhammad, who was advancing in age and in poor health, was unable to control the daily affairs of the many mosques that existed throughout the country. He was forced to delegate the
responsibilities to subordinates. At the same time, between 1970 and 1973, a core group of younger members became discontent with the conservative policies and lack of activism among the Nation of Islam’s leadership, resulting in a period of severe ideological conflict and insfighting. These problems were exacerbated by the increasingly oppressive demeanor of the Fruit of Islam (FOI), the paramilitary and security wing of the Nation of Islam.\footnote{Paul Delaney, “Black Muslim Group in Trouble From Financial Problems and Some Crime,” The New York Times 6 December 1974; “Back of Killings?: Religious Split Among Blacks,” U.S. News & World Report 5 February 1973, p. 83.} Although the men of the FOI were required to embody and uphold all of the highest ideals and principles of the Muslim movement, by the turbulent period of the early 1970s, there were hints that some units were beginning to degenerate and deviate from this strict standard. Wallace D. Muhammad, Elijah Muhammad’s son, later claimed that the FOI had become “an organization within an organization” and a brotherhood within the larger brotherhood. By the mid-1970s, Wallace characterized the FOI as a “hooligan” or “hoodlum outfit,” and a “political order,” with oppressive power within the Nation of Islam.\footnote{C. Eric Lincoln describe the Fruit of Islam as the single most powerful unit within the Muslim movement, stating: “This virtually autonomous body is an elite group, carefully chosen, rigorously trained, aware of its own distinction and responsibilities, admired (and very likely, feared) by the rest of the Muslim brotherhood. It is entrusted with top security assignments and remains on constant alert. Most ominous of all, it shrouds its activities in nearly absolute secrecy.... The Fruit of Islam is composed of the best physically and psychologically conditioned males in the Black Muslim movement, though the criteria for admission vary slightly to meet local conditions.” See, C. Eric Lincoln, Black Muslims, 201.} Others suggest that the problems that began to arise in the Philadelphia mosque and other cities may have been a result of the success that the Nation of Islam was experiencing, nationally as well as locally, in attracting new members.\footnote{Adib Rashad, Islam, Black Nationalism, and Slavery: A Detailed History (Beltsville, MD: Writers Inc., 1995), 223; Claude A. Glegg III, An Original Man, 235-268.}
In the late 1970s, former members of the Temple No. 12 asserted that the mosque had become "a victim of its own prosperity." They asserted that as the membership soared and successful businesses were established, opportunists came in and tried to use the mosque as a cover for their "criminal enterprises."\textsuperscript{114}

This notion correlates with the opinion of some scholars who maintain that by the 1970s, the national leadership became preoccupied with economic development and empowerment and began to focus attention on managing the organization’s expanding business assets. But with the sharp increase in recruitment and new focus on economic endeavors, it became increasingly difficult for the local mosques to assimilate new members fully and instill them all with the sect’s strict code of discipline.\textsuperscript{115}

An adequate analysis of the problems experienced by the Philadelphia mosque must also consider the operation of the FBI’s COINTELPRO. COINTELPRO (counter intelligence program) was established by the FBI to "expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, destroy or otherwise neutralize" all dissident groups in America that threatened the status quo. Almost from the very beginning of its creation as an agency, particularly under the leadership of J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI sought to eliminate all Black leaders or organizations that attempted to establish social, political, and economic equality, justice, or empowerment for African-Americans. This reality was demonstrated by the FBI’s campaign to "discredit, disrupt, or destroy individuals and organizations as

diverse as Marcus Garvey and the UNIA, Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Stokely Carmichael and the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, and, of course, the Nation of Islam. The FBI's counterintelligence program even infiltrated and spied upon organizations as innocuous as the NAACP. But the various Black nationalist and militant organizations that were active during the late 1960s encountered the full onslaught the devious tactics of COINTELPRO.116

The published accounts of the FBI's COINTELPRO papers from the late 1960s reveal that the agency sought to prevent a coalition of militant Black nationalist groups by preventing the rise of a "messiah" who could "unify and electrify" the Black nationalist movement, prevent violence by the groups, and prevent their organizations and leaders from gaining respectability by discrediting them. FBI agents used a variety of devious tactics to accomplish these aims. Personnel in the news media were used to publish or broadcast false or distorted information on the various organizations, agents distributed phony leaflets, posters, pamphlets, newspapers and other publications in the name of movement groups to discredit them or cause internal division, and forged correspondence was sent to various members or leaders of movements in order to exacerbate differences. But most pernicious was the use of agents provocateurs who

infiltrated selected organizations and actively worked to “disrupt, entrap, or neutralize” their targets. The reality of this major campaign against the various Black organizations of the 1960s and 1970s must be considered and kept in mind when analyzing the history of the Black Power movement in general and the Nation of Islam in particular, nationally and in the Black community of Philadelphia.  

The first of the series of specific problems associated with the Philadelphia Muslims involved the murder of the Reverend Clarence M. Smith, a prominent Black minister who was a well known and respected figure in the city’s Black church and political circles. Smith had been the pastor of Wayland Temple Baptist Church in North Philadelphia, the president of the New England Baptist Missionary Convention, the Grand Chaplain of the Grande Lodge of Elks, and a Republican member of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. Smith was also active in local politics and had run for the office of Councilman-at-Large in 1959 and for Congress in 1960. Accounts of Smith’s murder relate that on May 18, 1970, two men followed Reverend Smith’s daughter home from a bank after she had cashed a check. Upon entering her father’s home, the two men forced their way into the house and gave Reverend Smith a typed note, which read, “This is a stickup. Be cool. Do not move.” Smith and his daughter were then ordered to lie on the floor, and when Reverend Smith told them that there was no money,  

117 Ibid.
one of the men allegedly cursed and told the other to go ahead and shoot him. The Reverend was subsequently shot in the neck and chest.  

News of the murder shocked Philadelphia’s Black community, which was already reeling under the crime wave that was sweeping the city. Five thousand people attended Smith’s funeral while another ten thousand viewed his body. Philadelphia’s leading Black newspaper reported that “virtually every Baptist minister from the Philadelphia area was at the funeral, and representatives of churches from every part of the United States were in attendance.” The murder galvanized the community, and put intense pressure on Police Commissioner Frank Rizzo, to find the murderers.  

About three months after Reverend C.M. Smith’s murder, Philadelphia’s Black community suffered an even greater shock when Clarence X Fowler, a high-ranking captain of the “Fruit of Islam” (FOI) at Temple No. 12, was arrested for the murder. Fowler, described as a soft-spoken man with no prior criminal record, worked for an agency that rehabilitated gang members. During a press conference immediately following the arrest, Minister Jeremiah Shabazz maintained that Clarence X Fowler was completely innocent of the charges, and then proceeded to attack the local police who Jeremiah claimed had harassed the


119 Ibid.

120 Fruit of Islam (FOI)—The Nation of Islam’s elite paramilitary division that has a contingent at each temple (mosque) of each city.
Muslims and conducted a reign of terror on their homes—arresting men and terrorizing women and children. Asserting that Fowler was the victim of an “anti-Muslim vendetta” conducted against them by the police, Jeremiah contended:

“Gentlemen, I want you and the entire world to know that this was a vicious lie perpetrated against our brother whose only crime is being a Muslim and following the divine teachings of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad…. This was not an isolated incident involving one man, but a carefully organized plot …to portray us (Muslims) as a group of lawless ex-convicts who would stoop to committing such a crime on a fellow Black man who was a Christian minister.”

Jeremiah logically argued that the simple description of two well-dressed men seen leaving the crime scene automatically made all Muslims suspect since they were instructed to “be clean and neat at all times.” Jeremiah Shabazz and the local Muslims vowed to defend Fowler against the charges, and established Fowler’s alibi. According to Shabazz, Fowler was transacting business with Muslim headquarters in Chicago at the time of the murder. Although the famous boxer, Muhammad Ali, testified as a character witness for Fowler, the defendant was sentenced to life in prison. 121 Significantly, after serving five years in prison, Fowler’s life-term conviction was over turned by the state Supreme Court because of police misconduct during the investigation. 122

The true motives and circumstances surrounding Pastor Smith’s murder are not certain; but it is certain that this highly publicized incident jeopardized

Jeremiah Shabazz’s outreach efforts and threatened to disrupt the relatively benign relationship that had existed between Black Muslims and Christians in Philadelphia. Up to that time, there was no record of any major conflict or tension between the two religious groups in that particular city. On a national level, however, there may have been some general frustration building in Elijah Muhammad’s disposition towards some Christian ministers. In 1972, Muhammad ranted about Black reverends in an article printed in Sepia magazine:

I have begged the reverends for years to work with me to buy the South Side (of Chicago). . . . You reverends are worse than the white man. You won’t even offer me a dollar, because you don’t want us to build a kingdom of Black people. You would rather have it built by white people. I say to you, your day is done, because we, the Muslims, are about to take over.\textsuperscript{123}

But a major exception to Elijah Muhammad’s characterization of Black preachers, was exemplified in the person Reverend Leon H. Sullivan. In May of 1970, Reverend Sullivan of North Philadelphia’s Zion Baptist Church took up a collection of $528 dollars and donated it to the Muslim’s farm efforts. Elijah Muhammad later commended Reverend Sullivan in an editorial printed in Muhammad Speaks which stated, “We thank them and pray Allah that all the churches will see eye to eye with Rev. Leon H. Sullivan, that the uniting of us to go to the farm and grow our own food will give us 75 percent of our independence. We are proud of Rev. Leon H. Sullivan and his congregation. This is the only way that Black Men can exist and be recognized: it is to work

\textsuperscript{122} The police had shown a witness photos of Fowler before she identified him as the assailant. See, Tyree Johnson, “Con May Be Cleaning Up Mosque,” Philadelphia Daily News 20 February 1978.

together for our common cause."\textsuperscript{124} It was later in that same month, however, that the murder of Pastor Clarence Smith occurred.

Unfortunately for the reputation of Philadelphia’s Temple No. 12, the murder of Reverend Clarence M. Smith was only the first of a series of heinous crimes in which their members were implicated. Unlike Clarence X. Flower, the subsequent suspects were men with extensive criminal records and brought increasing negative publicity to the Nation of Islam. On January fourth, 1971, a gang of eight gunmen robbed Dubrow’s Furniture Store, on Philadelphia’s South Street. In broad, daylight, the men pistol-whipped and shot several of the store’s employees, killing one while twenty others were bound and gagged. The perpetrators also set the store on fire in an attempt to burn it down before casually walking out into the rush-hour traffic. One week later, the first two suspects in this crime were arrested, and both were members of the Philadelphia mosque. The mother of one of the suspects, named Edward Sistrunk, claimed that police were trying to “lynch her son because of his Muslim religion.” Proclaiming her son’s innocence, the woman argued, “Yes my son did have a record, but since he joined the Muslims seven years ago, he has been clean. He wanted to help his family, and keep them off relief.” These protests were of no avail as each of the suspects was subsequently incarcerated.\textsuperscript{125}

The ruinous trend continued in separate incidents involving two Muslims who were later alleged to be co-founders of Philadelphia’s Black Mafia. The first

incident, referred to as the “Easter Sunday massacre” occurred on April 3rd, 1972, when five persons—three women and two men—“were slain in a hail of gunfire,” by between six to nine gunmen at Club Harlem, a popular nightspot in Atlantic City, New Jersey. The early reports of the crime stated that the shooting was the result of a “drug war between two Philadelphia dope pushing gangs.” All of the victims were innocent patrons except for the one intended target, Tyrone Palmer, a known Philadelphia drug pusher. The prime suspect of the crime was Samuel Christian, described as a hit man for the Black Mafia, and a captain of the FOI at Philadelphia’s Mosque No. 12.126

In June of 1973, four men were involved in the slaying of Major Coxson, a flamboyant Philadelphia entrepreneur allegedly involved in narcotics, who a month earlier, had lost a race to become the first Black mayor of Camden, New Jersey—a small city on the Delaware river, across from Philadelphia. Coxson, his common-law wife, and her two teen-aged children were beaten and shot at their home in the Philadelphia suburb of Cherry Hill, New Jersey. Coxson’s 16 year-old stepdaughter eventually died from her injuries. Ronald Harvey of West Philadelphia, described as a high-ranking member of the local mosque, was the first suspect arrested for the crime. He eventually jumped bail and fled the city. Several weeks later, it was discovered that the fugitive was also a suspected participant in Washington, DC’s “Hanafi” massacre, which would be the most

---

notorious in the series of crimes attributed to members of the Philadelphia mosque.127

On January 19th, 1973, Washington, DC experienced the biggest mass murder in its history when seven members of an African-American orthodox Moslem sect called the Hanafis were executed in their home in the northwest section of the city. The victims included five children and four adults, one of whom survived the incident. After an intense federal investigation, seven Muslims from Philadelphia’s Temple No. 12 were charged with the murders, including Ronald Harvey, the fugitive from the Coxson murder in New Jersey. The murders were allegedly made in retaliation against the orthodox sect’s founder, Hamaas Abdul Khaalis, who had written letters attacking Elijah Muhammad and his teachings and then sent the letters to members of the Nation of Islam throughout the country. These murders were the culmination of a series of violent crimes, beginning in 1969, allegedly committed by members of Temple No. 12.128

The Hanafi murders also represented a culmination to the Nation of Islam’s period of serious infighting, which had resulted in “16 murders, 19

shootings, two bombings and two abductions” between 1971 and 1973. During that period, an increasingly vocal core of disgruntled members and ex-members began to criticize the Nation of Islam’s leadership, including Elijah Muhammad, concerning some of the movement’s programs, ideology, and financial priorities. Many of these dissenters began to form renegade movements and “off-shoots” from the Nation of Islam in various cities, including Hamaas Abdul Khaalis’s movement in Washington, DC. Khaalis’s letter campaign was bound to attract the wrath of the most zealous core of the Nation of Islam’s membership. For many of those who had served time in prison, the Nation of Islam was often the sole entity to reach out to them and give them something to believe in, thus securing their undying loyalty and commitment once they were free. Since Muslims in the Nation of Islam believed that Elijah Muhammad was the divine messenger of Allah and credited him with delivering many of their lives from depravity, it would not be surprising that the squad of Muslims from the Philadelphia mosque, given their extensive criminal records, were motivated to commit the heinous massacre in Washington, DC, all in the name of defending their leader.129

The connection of known Philadelphia Muslims to such high-profile crimes was a public relations disaster for the local mosque and presented a major challenge to Minister Jeremiah Shabazz’s efforts to position the movement as a legitimate and respected institution in the city. The incidents were a major, national embarrassment, for the entire Nation of Islam as an organization. The

mass murder in Washington, DC, in particular, cast a negative spotlight on the Nation of Islam during a period in which its national leadership was striving to improve the organization's public image, expand economic activities, and attract educated and technically skilled converts from the growing Black middle class. But in spite of this embarrassment and bad publicity, Minister Jeremiah Shabazz proceeded in his efforts to increase the Nation of Islam’s presence and power in Philadelphia. But cases widely publicized by the Philadelphia media, which linked members of Temple No. 12 to murder, extortion, drug dealing, embezzlement, and other crimes, continued to haunt Shabazz throughout the 1970s. Shabazz increasingly had to defend the Muslims against allegations that his Philadelphia mosque was actually sheltering the criminal members and benefiting, financially, from their illegal activities. Such accusations eventually led to what would be its first major conflict with another Black organization—the Black Economic Development Conference (BEDC), which had three primary spokesmen—Reverends Muhammad Kenyatta, Wycliffe Jangdharrie, and Dwight Campbell.\(^{130}\)

James Forman, formerly of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and other activists formed the National Black Economic Development Conference in Detroit in April of 1969. The BEDC proclaimed that all white controlled religious, business, and governmental institutions owed African Americans reparations because all of these mainstream institutions had either benefited from, or were directly involved in, the systematic exploitation of

\(^{130}\) Ibid; "Now the Black Mafia Bilks Banks," *Philadelphia Inquirer* 24 August 1975; James
Blacks during slavery and the continuing racism of the twentieth-century. The organization’s chapter in Philadelphia therefore endeavored to procure money from local religious and governmental institutions for the stated purpose of alleviating the current sufferings of impoverished Blacks in the city. Muhammad Kenyatta (Donald Jackson), a former member of SNCC and the Northern Student Movement, became the most outspoken and widely recognized leader of Philadelphia’s chapter of the BEDC. In Philadelphia, the organization established a relationship with many ministers from the city’s Black churches, who were also concerned with issues involving Black poverty.\(^{131}\)

In 1974, the organization began to focus on Philadelphia’s growing crime and drug problem. At a press conference held in January of 1974, Reverends Muhammad Kenyatta, Wycliffe Jangdharrie, and Dwight Campbell, spokesmen for the BEDC and the Council of Black Clergy, announced a nine-point program to fight Philadelphia’s drug dealers and declared war on the city’s feared Black Mafia. The coalition’s nine-point program, consisted of the following objectives:

--To call on Black ministers of all faiths to educate their church members about heroin and to publicly denounce all those engaged in the drug traffic.
--To seek an audience with Mayor Rizzo to solicit his support for the all-out crusade against the Black Mafia and the drug traffic.
--To seek an audience with Police Commissioner Joseph O’Neill to get him to initiate a crackdown against drug pushers.
--To visit politicians, “especially in light of the claim by many white politicians that they haven’t hit this problem for fear of being called racists.”
--To meet with District Attorney Emmet Fitzpatrick “to let him know that the Black community wants a crackdown on all those

\(^{131}\) Countryman, 606-13.
involved with pushing drugs, regardless of their race or political affiliation.”
--To meet with state legislators “to let them know we want life imprisonment and rehabilitation through hard labor for all drug pushers.”
--To focus attention on the gang members who are recruited for big-league crime and to de-glamorize them by giving attention to the 98 percent of young people who are not involved in gang activity.

Reverend Jangdharrie stated that, “We are going to make these vermin in the Black Mafia known to the police, even though it will put our own lives in jeopardy, and we are going to involve every Black minister in Philadelphia . . . Those who do not cooperate will be exposed to the entire community.”

Commenting on the nature of drug trafficking in Philadelphia, the spokesmen continued, “We realize that the top echelons of the billion-dollar hard drug traffic are white mobsters and men in high places capitalizing upon the racism and political corruption of this society. But we also know that the rise of Black organized crime as the controllers of hard-drug distribution in our communities is the greatest immediate obstacle to safety, decency, peace and unity among our people.” He acknowledged that the overall problem was compounded “by the fact that many policemen are being paid off and many crooked politicians will place a phone call to a judge to get these pushers out of jail as soon as they’re arrested.”

The press conference provoked protests from Minister Jeremiah Shabazz, who interpreted the BEDC’s stance as a veiled attack and attempt to link his mosque and the Nation of Islam to Philadelphia’s Black Mafia crime syndicate. It
is not clear why Shabazz assumed that the BEDC spokespersons were accusing
the mosque of sanctioning the Black Mafia, but his apprehension may have
stemmed from the increased focus on the Muslim’s problems that were being
publicized in the local, mainstream media. In response to Shabazz’s protests,
Muhammad Kenyatta, issued a public description of a visit that he made to
Minister Shabazz to explain the BEDC’s crusade against crime, asserting:

Minister Shabazz quickly raised a matter of special concern to him. Why is it, he asked, that when a non-Muslim is suspected of a
crime, no one ever identifies the suspect as a Catholic or Methodist
or Baptist; yet when a Muslim is suspected his religious identity is
immediately focussed upon? Not only does this happen with the
white media such as Today Magazine or Philadelphia Magazine,
but even some Black journalists have presented real or alleged
misconduct by Muslims in a way that seems to implicate the entire
religion. Minister Shabazz particularly noted a radio broadcast of
a recent press conference held by none other than this writer
(Kenyatta) himself!

Ross, Jangdharrarie and I drew Brother Jeremiah’s attention
to a verbatim copy of the BEDC news release and nine-point
anticrime program showing that these contain NO derogatory
reference to the Nation of Islam or ANY religious group. As a
Christian minister, I voiced my own concern that—in fact—the
vast majority of criminals in our community are persons who are
from NOMINALLY Christian homes. As has been pointed out by
a Black police official in Chicago, Muslims have a much lower
crime rate than their Black Christian brothers and sisters in that
city.

We all agreed that the Honorable Elijah Muhammad has
done more to rehabilitate former criminals and drug addicts than
any other one person in America over the past forty years. Indeed,
we told Minister Shabazz, the BEDC fight against heroin peddlers
draws inspiration from the great work of Elijah Muhammad!

Yet the fact remains that Muslims are often singled out
when religious affiliation ought to be irrelevant.

---

1974.
Conceding that there was a great chance that agent-provocateurs had infiltrated the NOI and were provoking or performing illegal acts to discredit the organization, Kenyatta asserted, “the Federal Bureau of Investigation itself has bragged about keeping the Black Muslim movement under surveillance, labeling the Muslims as subversive together with the Black Panther Party, the Republic of New Africa, our own BEDC and almost every other outspoken Black organization in this country. And attempting to reconcile with Shabazz and alleviate his suspicions concerning alleged religious prejudices against Muslims, Kenyatta continued:

Such prejudices provide fertile ground for manipulation by outside forces—whether police agents, sophisticated criminal elements or any other enemies of the community. To be on safe ground, a wise observer will insist upon facts and be very suspicious of unsubstantiated rumors. Above all, he must judge others by their actions rather than by group identities.

Let it be known that enemies of our people come in many different racial and religious combinations—the Italian Catholic Mafia, the White House “German Mafia” of Watergate infamy and now the so-called Black Mafia. There is no place for religious bigotry among ourselves. Let our watchword be UNITY as we tackle our enemies, external and internal, regardless of religion.133

When Kenyatta finally met with Mayor Rizzo to present the BEDC’s crusade against heroin, he again attempted to alleviate Shabazz’s concerns by stating to the mayor, “People of nominally Christian, Muslim, agnostic and atheist backgrounds have been in the crime traffic. It should be understood, however,

that we are in no way concerned about, or involved in efforts to single out the Nation of Islam as dealers in the drug traffic.”

Still on the defensive, Minister Jeremiah Shabazz rejected Muhammad Kenyatta’s explanation and reconciliation attempt. At an “open-to-the-public” meeting at the University of Pennsylvania’s Irving Auditorium, Shabazz reportedly assailed Kenyatta asking, “Who is this nigger Kenyatta who has set himself up as a leader of the Black people?—a nigger who is the modern version of the plantation nigger in slavery times—selling out his Black brothers—uncle tomming for the white man. The first thing he did was to point the finger at us. We who have done nothing but preach good and love for our Black brothers and sisters.” Shabazz continued to lambast the BEDC’s spokesmen, asserting, “We Muslims don’t have time for dope. There is no dope in our Muslim headquarters! Kenyatta and that mixed up Indian (Jangdharric) have been to Muslim headquarters only once and that was the only time any dope has ever been there and then it was two dopes!”

In response to Jeremiah Shabazz’s charges, Muhammad Kenyatta answered, “We have made no accusations about the Nation of Islam. We are only concerned about wiping out the hard drug traffic in our Black communities. It was in this connection that we not only asked Minister Jeremiah but every other Black religious leader in Philadelphia, Christian or Muslim to help drive the pushers out of the communities.” But Kenyatta also retaliated against Shabazz’s

defensive tirade by naming known Muslims who were involved in organized crime, stating:

“It is certainly true that many of the persons known to be leaders in Philadelphia’s Black Mafia and the Black Brothers, Inc. have identified themselves as members of the Nation of Islam. We think that people who are sincerely concerned about the welfare of the Black community will be more interested in attacking [the Black Mafia], than attacking us. It is not our fault that they are Black Muslims, for we did not recruit them into the Nation of Islam.”

Wycliffe Jangdharrie issued an even sharper response to Shabazz by mentioning two notorious Muslims who were involved in the three separate mass murders, and others who were involved in organized crime, stating:

What is Sam Christian if not a Muslim? As is Ronald Harvey and Brother Roosevelt “Kenyatta” Fitzgerald. We are well aware of the record of these men. It is known that the Black Brothers have been giving large donations to the Mosque. Where are they getting the money, for they are not working? Why do they not make large contributions to some other charitable group?

The Starks boys have been seen frequenting the Mosque on Susquehanna Avenue on a number of occasions. We are not blaming the Mosque, but there are a series of questions such visitations automatically raises.\(^{136}\)

Later Jangdharrie emphasized that it was “not their intention to attempt to penalize the Muslims because members of the Black Mafia share that faith.” That, he said, “would be the equivalent of putting the Catholic church down because white mafians are members of that church. All we’re asking is that all ministers move against anyone in their church engaged in organized crime.”\(^{137}\)

The drama continued when several days later, Minister Jeremiah Shabazz announced plans to sue Reverend Muhammad Kenyatta for slander. At the

\(^{136}\) Ibid.

103
Muslim’s Sunday meeting at their headquarters in North Philadelphia, Shabazz challenged Kenyatta, the Philadelphia Police Department, and the FBI, to prove his guilt. If they can find one shred of evidence that proves me guilty, then they may have my head.” Shabazz claimed that before arriving at the mosque, he had viewed Kenyatta on a television program saying that, “I (Shabazz) had offered him (Kenyatta) money to keep his mouth quiet on my dealings with the Black Mafia.” Denying the accusation, Shabazz exclaimed to the Muslims and visitors:

That is a lie! I don’t know any of the Black Mafia and I certainly wouldn’t offer him one penny to keep his mouth quiet. As a matter of fact, this man Kenyatta has turned out to be a real blessing for us in disguise, for our Muslim ranks have done nothing but swell since he has been talking against us. Kenyatta has been a real Watergate-Nixon for us, the kind of agent that we have needed for a long time. Now we don’t have enough seats to hold all the people that come out to our meetings. He is a hired gun for the white man. Our poorest person in the Black community wouldn’t do and speak out against us as Kenyatta is doing. I know Dr. Leon Sullivan and most of the Black judges in the city, but no one is doing what he is attempting against us.

Here is a man with no track record. So who has committed the crime? He should do something about that. He says that I should kick the criminal elements out of the Mosque. If he knows anyone who has committed a crime, he should do something about it. I am not a policeman.

Referring to the Nation of Islam’s successful drug treatment programs, Shabazz asserted, “I can show Kenyatta hundreds of Black brothers and sisters that we have taken off dope and are now happy members of our faith. Where is his record that he has corrected just one addict?”

137 “BEDC Links Judge’s Aide to Dope Ring,” Philadelphia Tribune 13 April 1974.
This dramatic feud between the Philadelphia Muslims and the BEDC continued throughout the summer of 1974, and essentially represents a drastic effort by Jeremiah Shabazz to mitigate the damage caused by the mosque’s alleged association with the Black Mafia. During this period, Shabazz began to defend his mosque more forcefully, denouncing any individual or group that even hinted that his organization might have actually sanctioned criminal activity. There also seems to have been a personal dislike and rivalry between the two leaders, particularly on the part of Jeremiah Shabazz towards Muhammad Kenyatta. In any case, both sides eventually gained supporters among the various Black activists, organizations, and leaders in Philadelphia.

Congressman Robert N.C. Nix, the Pennsylvania State Conference of the NAACP, and the Episcopalian Restitution Fund all publicly endorsed the BEDC’s anti-heroin crusade. Others, such as Samuel L. Evans, National Chairman of the American Foundation for Negro Affairs, and Cecil B. Moore, former president of Philadelphia’s branch of the NAACP, supported Minister Jeremiah Shabazz, and questioned Muhammad Kenyatta’s motives and sincerity. Some of Jeremiah Shabazz’s supporters also insinuated that Muhammad Kenyatta was an informant and provocateur for the FBI. Nevertheless, the BEDC’s campaign put an increased spotlight on the activities of Black organized crime in Philadelphia, and along with testimony that was revealed during the trial of those responsible for the Hanafi murders in Washington, DC, the attention of federal agencies was drawn

---

to the crime syndicates in Philadelphia. In September of 1974, federal narcotics agents arrested twenty of the core members of the Black Mafia, effectively crippling the syndicate although other members continued operating into the late 1970s. Ultimately, the syndicate, which at its height was believed to have controlled 80 percent of all heroin traffic in Philadelphia, was deemed responsible for at least 50 murders during a four-year period. Law enforcement officials and the media insisted that the leaders of the Black Mafia were all "Black Muslims."  

Despite the extensive controversy surrounding the Philadelphia mosque in the 1970s, the growing presence of the Nation of Islam in Philadelphia was not undermined, suggesting that the public relations campaign orchestrated by Jeremiah Shabazz was a success. By the time of Elijah Muhammad's death in 1975, Philadelphia's Temple number 12 was clearly one among the three strongest mosques in the country. At one public meeting a young woman even attacked the BEDC's leaders, calling them "punks and thugs" and exclaiming that their attack on the "Black Muslims" was an attempt "to put an end to the last independent force in the Black community." Regardless of the known links of

some mosque members to the Black Mafia, there remained a strong perception, among many in the community, that the Muslims were a positive influence.\(^{142}\)

The Nation of Islam’s appeal to a significant element of Philadelphia’s Black youth raises questions concerning its relations with other militant and/or nationalistic groups that were also attracting younger Blacks during the height of the Black Power movement. Since these various militant groups were competing for the same demographic group, there may have been competition that naturally resulted as the organizations continued to expand. There are accounts of serious hostility erupting between some of the militant/nationalist groups in other cities during the Black Power era. And there were some minor instances of friction between the Muslims of Temple No. 12 and other nationalistic groups in Philadelphia, but there were no episodes of serious strife or antagonism. With one exception (other than the conflict with the BEDC) the local NOI mosque in Philadelphia had a cooperative relationship with other Black organizations in the city.

During the late 1960s, there was one instance of publicized tension between the Nation of Islam and a branch of the city’s Black Panthers. In October of 1968, controversy arose when Terry McHarris, a self-proclaimed leader of a local Black Panther unit hurled verbal shots and threats at Minister Jeremiah X and Stanley Branche (the Black Coalition’s executive director), accusing them both of “fronting for the [white] man.” McHarris issued a public proclamation stating that his branch of the Black Panther Party was “setting up

---

\(^{142}\) “BEDC Links Judge’s Aide to Dope Ring.” *Philadelphia Tribune* 13 April 1974.
shop in Philadelphia” and would confront “Negroes” (referring to Jeremiah, Branche, and others) in the community and that if they didn’t go along, the Panthers would eliminate them. McHarris also issued a recruitment appeal aimed at city’s troubled Black youth who were involved in street gangs, stating that these youth were the community’s potential leaders.\(^{143}\) Stanley Branche, in response, characterized McHarris’s proclamations as simply “cheap grandstanding” and responded by stating, “There’s room in this city for a lot of organizations and if he wants to come here he’s welcome. But I don’t like to see Black people fighting Black people. They’re not the enemy.”\(^{144}\) There was no official response from Minister Jeremiah X to McHarris’s comments. A week later, however, McHarris inexplicably retracted his statements and issued a public apology and praise to Minister Jeremiah and the Muslims, stating:

Minister Jeremiah works for the benefit of Black people. He’s no Uncle Tom, never was and never will be. He is for unity among Black people and not a flunky for the white power structure. We want to work with community organizations and groups, including the Muslims. The relations between the Muslims and Panthers are good. They will not be destroyed by anything. Thinking Black people should be thinking about the honorable Elijah Muhammad. His paper shows the true nature of Black people and the white man—the enemy.\(^{145}\)


\(^{145}\) “Panther Aide Has Some Praise for Jeremiah X,” Philadelphia Tribune 19 October 1968; note: McHarris’s complete turnaround and unexplained retraction of his comments is hard to explain. But in examining the rhetoric permeating his retraction, and considering how powerful the “Fruit of Islam” (the Nation of Islam’s paramilitary organization) of the Philadelphia mosque would prove to be during this period, it is highly possible that the Nation of Islam’s local soldiers paid McHarris a visit and convinced him to change his mind concerning Jeremiah and offer the public apology and retraction.
Terry McHarris and his group of Black Panthers, however, are an enigma and cannot be used to determine the true nature of the two organizations’ coexistence. McHarris’s group of Panthers appears to have been a renegade organization, for in the same attack on the Black Coalition, McHarris also attacked other Black Panthers stating, “There are only about 10 real Panthers in Philly. The others are not Panthers. They have taken no oath. They have no program.” About a week later, however, the official Black Panther Party in Philadelphia issued a statement identifying McHarris as an impostor who had no affiliation with the organization. There is no direct evidence to determine who McHarris was or what his true motivations were. And even though he claimed to be a Black Panther leader and spoke at local college campuses about the Party, the official organization in Philadelphia rejected his group, and unknown assailants eventually murdered him in 1970. Other than McHarris’s isolated attacks on Jeremiah X, there were no clear instances of any major, public tension or conflict between the Nation of Islam and the Black Panther Party in Philadelphia. But what unites the two groups is their ability and willingness to attract the youth—including troubled youth involved in delinquency, and their skillful use of the local Black media as a forum to disseminate their views, propagandize, and present perspectives that were not covered in the mainstream media.147

147 “Black Panther Party Organizer Is Killed,” Philadelphia Tribune 25 April 1976; “Panthers Put Down S. Phila. Impostor,” Philadelphia Tribune 16 September 1969: Panther spokesman states: “There is a person running around South Philadelphia claiming to be a member, of, and Captain of the Black Panther Party. There is only one recognized Branch of the Black Panther Party in the State of Pennsylvania, and that is the Branch Office located in North Philadelphia, 1928 w. Columbia ave. CE 6-3358. There is only one Defense Captain in this State. His name is Capt. Reggie Schell. We have received numerous reports on the activities of this ‘Captain of the South
Considering the inflammatory and bizarre nature of McHarris's initial, unprovoked comments, and taking into consideration the information that has now been revealed concerning COINTELPRO and the FBI's campaign to destroy Black organizations through various forms of trickery and misinformation, it is conceivable that this incident represented more than just a rivalry between two organizations. But whether or not this particular incident was a government ploy designed to provoke antagonism and violence between two of the leading Black nationalist organizations during this period, similar instances occurred over the next several years until tangible evidence of the FBI's COINTELPRO tactics were obtained in 1972 in Media, Pennsylvania, a Philadelphia suburb. In any case, even before the FBI's counterintelligence program became publicly revealed, one prescient Philadelphia citizen expressed suspicions concerning the increasing conflicts between various militant organizations in a letter to the *Philadelphia Tribune* in which he wrote:

Sir...[a]lthough I unashamedly categorize myself as a proponent of revolutionary action, the mounting verbal confrontations between the Black Panthers and other Black militant organizations are beginning to puzzle me. The constant bickering among these so-called "soul-brothers" makes me wonder whether or not the growing schism is a product of an intricate bit of CIA type undercutting. Certainly the Panthers should be opposed to Ron Karenga's cultural nationalists. Karenga's type of foolishness is dangerous and superficial and does not address itself to subliminal...
white racism and prevailing capitalism. The growing Panther hostility toward the Black Muslims, however, seems uncalled for. The Muslims have given the Panthers and the other third-world liberation movements a good press. This is something that shouldn’t be minimized. Also, like it or not, it was Elijah Muhammad who told us how terrible the word “Negro” was. Those of us who consider ourselves perceptive should pause and analyze the reasons why the “vanguard party” readily embraces the Abby Hoffmans of the world and lambasts the Muslims. Could there be some sort of “stranger in between” programming this divisive hostility?  

Be that as it may, from about 1969 to 1971, the Black Panther Party appears to have garnered the most public attention and support in Philadelphia because of its highly publicized community programs, and two Black Panthers even ran for city council. In September of 1970, Philadelphia was also the site of the Black Panther Party’s national convention, which drew 14,000 participants and made a positive impression on many in the city’s Black community, particularly the youth. In a city known for its oppressive police force, the Panther’s had an obvious appeal to many of these Black youth. As Matthew Countryman cogently observes, for “young men who had grown used to daily harassment from police, the party offered the opportunity not only to protect themselves, but their families and communities.”

The Nation of Islam does not appear to have supplanted the Black Panther Party’s popularity until the period following the 1970 convention. During that

---

period, Police Commissioner Frank Rizzo intensified a campaign of harassment and attacks against the Black Panthers, culminating in a series of raids on the Party’s three Philadelphia offices in August of 1970. Although Rizzo’s attacks, along with the convention, contributed to the Black Panthers’ highest level of growth and popularity in Philadelphia, some argue that this period was actually the beginning of their eventual decline. Huey Newton’s speech at the convention—his first after being released from prison—was judged a disappointing failure that did not connect with the audience. Newton’s shift in policy from an emphasis on armed self-defense to an increased emphasis on social programs also alienated many, especially the young males who had been attracted initially by the former. And with continued attacks from federal and local law enforcement, the Panthers local decline mirrored a national decline, leaving a local membership of only twenty-five by 1973, down from a peak of 150. The decline of the Philadelphia Panthers during the first half of the 1970s coincides with the Nation of Islam’s Temple No.12’s beginning its most successful inroads into Philadelphia’s Black communities. The Nation of Islam seemed to be the one “militant” group able to survive the local attacks of the Frank Rizzo led Philadelphia police department and the national schemes of COINTELPRO.

150 Throughout his political career in Philadelphia, Frank Rizzo was notorious for his unswerving support for the idea of “law and order” and the oppressive level of police brutality against that city’s Black populace. Some have also intimated that many of the tactics used in Rizzo’s campaign against Black radicalism in Philadelphia was actually a precursor or prototype to the tactics used in COINTELPRO. See, Countryman 377-379, 444, 453-462; Ward Churchill, Agents of Repression: The FBI War Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement (Boston: South End Press, 1980), 44-47.

CHAPTER 4
FROM BLACK NATIONALISM TO SUNNI ISLAM

Elijah Muhammad’s death in February of 1975 resulted in drastic changes for the national organization, and eventually marked the end of an era for the Philadelphia mosque. Wallace D. Muhammad, one of Elijah Muhammad’s six sons, who headed the Philadelphia mosque from 1958 to 1961, was named as the new leader of the Nation of Islam. Philadelphia’s Minister Jeremiah Shabazz, who delivered the eulogy at Elijah Muhammad’s funeral, pledged his full support to W. D. Muhammad in his position as the new leader of the national organization. Wallace’s initial succession as leader proceeded in an orderly fashion.152

W. D. Muhammad’s first public address after his inauguration was held in Philadelphia at the city’s convention hall and was attended by over 25,000 people. The Nation of Islam’s new leader received what was described as a “red carpet” reception extended to him by city officials. Goldie Watson, deputy to the mayor, presented Wallace with a proclamation signed by Mayor Frank Rizzo declaring

---


April 27th as “Nation of Islam day.” Mrs. Watson announced that it was with a “mixture of humility and pride” that she welcomed Supreme Minister Muhammad back to Philadelphia. Representing the mayor, Watson also stated that “the doors of city hall were no longer closed to representatives of the Nation of Islam.” Wallace remarked that the city’s reception was “really a big change” from the last time he was there when he served as minister of the Philadelphia mosque from 1958 to 1961. A spokesman for the Philadelphia mosque asserted that “some 10,000 people who had never been to a Muslims’ meeting” attended the convention, along with 50 bus loads of other attendees from New York, Washington, D.C. and as far away as Virginia.153

This warm welcome extended to the Muslims by Mayor Frank Rizzo’s administration appears to be an anomaly when considering Rizzo’s historic repression of Black nationalist and militant groups, and the Philadelphia Black community in general. But in Chicago, a similar shift in Mayor Richard Daley’s treatment of the Nation Islam can be explained, and it sheds light on what might have happened in Philadelphia. In the mid-1970s, Daley passed resolutions praising Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam as a positive community institution. Claude A. Clegg III attributes this changing attitude of politicians toward the Nation of Islam to the reality that Elijah Muhammad’s “thorough embrace of mainstream values—from entrepreneurial capitalism to puritanical morals—made him acceptable to many who had been apprehensive about the

Nation in the past.” By the mid-1970s, the Nation of Islam began to accrue recognition as a “tolerable American institution,” and Clegg suggests that Daley “had simply become used to the Nation’s being around and thankful that it had not gone the ‘radical’ route of the Black Panthers and others.” Undoubtedly some of the compliments were simply “preliminary eulogies” for the leader who was already very ill. And during the days surrounding Elijah’s death, Mayor Daley declared February 26 “Nation of Islam Day” in Chicago, while Black Mayors Thomas Bradley of Los Angeles, Kenneth Gibson of Newark, and Richard G. Hatcher of Gary, Indiana later issued similar proclamations.154

Elijah Muhammad’s death allowed the beginning of a clear change in at least a segment of the institution he had led. Almost immediately upon assuming his position as leader, Wallace began to alter long-standing doctrines that had been essential tenets of Nation’s theology since its inception. During March of 1975, Wallace announced that although the official policy of the organization would continue to be one of racial separation, whites would no longer be called “devils.” Later it was decided that some whites would be allowed to join the Nation of Islam. On the Nation’s Sunday radio broadcast on Philadelphia’s WHAT-AM, Jeremiah Shabazz announced that “the Honorable Wallace D. Muhammad believes that there are ‘some whites who have physical minds like Black people...they want to do what’s right and we must make provisions for them.’” Shabazz explained that as soon as the mosque was able to acquire a

number of properties in predominantly white Northeast Philadelphia and in the Italian sections of South Philadelphia, then “missions would be set up for the orderly admission of whites who have expressed a desire to become followers of the Honorable Wallace D. Muhammad.”

These announcements shocked many in Philadelphia’s Black community, and required a more detailed explanation from Shabazz. A week later on the NOI’s “Muhammad Speaks to Philadelphia” television program, Shabazz submitted that “the Honorable Wallace D. Muhammad is not going out of his way to recruit whites but will represent those minorities and oppressed third world people, some of whom happen to be white.” Shabazz continued his explication, saying:

I want to make it properly clear to everyone that the Nation of Islam maintains its same policies of being a Black nation run by Black people. . . . I want to allay the fears of all the brothers and sisters who might at this time think we are changing our policy and going soft on the white man. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Honorable Wallace D. Muhammad continues to place the blame where the blame belongs, but he realizes there are oppressed peoples all over the world. We (Black people) are the most oppressed, but there are other oppressed people that he is going to represent and in these he includes a few whites.

Several days later, Wallace Muhammad and New York’s Minister Louis Farrakhan explained further, in a live nationally televised broadcast from Madison Square Garden, why the Nation of Islam had decided to admit whites, essentially

---

rationalizing it as a higher teaching of Elijah Muhammad. Although the leading ministers of the Nation of Islam initially presented a public veneer of unity and support for this position, it later became apparent that many were secretly opposed to these changes. Only a decade earlier, the whole movement had accused Malcolm X of being a hypocrite for taking a similar position, which while not supporting integration, did reject the doctrine that whites were inherent, unchangeable “devils” by nature. 156

Ultimately, these changes instituted by Wallace D. Muhammad produced friction between him and Jeremiah Shabazz, who many believe did not truly support the acceptance of whites. But open conflict was allayed when Wallace promoted Jeremiah to a new position as Eastern Regional representative of the Nation of Islam, giving Jeremiah jurisdiction over the immense New York mosque, while retaining his position as minister of the Philadelphia mosque. This decision appears to have been a strategic move by Wallace Muhammad to weaken the powerful New York mosque (from which the popular Minister Louis Farrakhan was removed and transferred to Chicago), while simultaneously appeasing whatever displeasure may have been arising in Jeremiah Shabazz concerning the changes that Wallace was instituting.

The Nation of Islam in Philadelphia, however, continued to grow despite whatever concerns may have arisen concerning the abrupt changes. One month after Wallace Muhammad’s address to the 25,000 convention attendees in

---

156 Ibid.

Philadelphia, Jeremiah Shabazz asserted that their rank and file in the city had tripled. Shabazz stressed that since Elijah Muhammad’s death, the branches of their mosque in Philadelphia had increased from four to eight in the various predominantly Black sections of the city, while their school’s enrollment increased from 500 to 800 students with 700 more on a waiting list. To celebrate and cap off this year of successful growth and expansion, Jeremiah Shabazz planned to convene a first annual “International Muslim Unity Bazaar” over the Labor Day weekend. This event would be a three day affair showcasing African, Asian, Middle Eastern, Caribbean and Puerto Rican cultural exhibitions and dances displayed by international students and residents living in the Philadelphia/Delaware Valley metropolitan area. An assortment of prominent Black political, business and labor leaders, as well as some of the most popular jazz and soul musicians of that period were also scheduled to participate in the event.\footnote{157}

On the 24\textsuperscript{th} of August, however, several days before the unity bazaar was to commence, the Muslims’ “honeymoon” period of public relations came to a halt: when the Sunday edition of the Philadelphia Inquirer ran a lengthy, front-page, feature article on the “Black Mafia” and insinuated a connection with Temple No. 12. Once again, suspicions of an alleged link between the Philadelphia mosque and criminal enterprises came back to haunt Minister Shabazz and the Philadelphia Muslims at a time of unprecedented growth. The

lead story entitled, “Now the Black Mafia Bilks Banks,” detailed the Black
Mafia’s penetration into various forms of white collar crime and use of
“sophisticated stratagems” to swindle banks, airlines, credit-card concerns, the
State Welfare Department, car-rental agencies and other businesses. The article
suggested that the moneys gained from these enterprises were pumped back into
other illicit enterprises, such as the Black Mafia’s multi-million dollar narcotics
operation, while other money had been given by check to “Muhammad’s Temple
Number 12, the Black Muslim Mosque at 1319 Susquehanna Ave., possibly as a
sort of tithe.” After implying this link with the Philadelphia mosque, the article
conceded that the minister “Jeremiah Shaheed Muslim Shabazz,” has denied any
knowledge of criminal activity involving his mosque.”158

Immediately following its printing, a spokesman for Minister Jeremiah
Shabazz attacked the Inquirer’s article, contending that it was,

an obvious attempt to discredit the Temple, especially in light of
the bazaar we expect to attract thousands of people including
whites who will be at such Muslim affairs for the first time in the
history of the group. . . . The mis-statement of facts are seen in
such articles frequently before a mass rally to unify the progressive
elements of this city. . . .

The spokesman further stated that their top officials were seeking a meeting with
a management team of the Inquirer, and that the Inquirer management would be
“given a chance to clarify the false charges made against the Temple. But if no
such clarification [was] forthcoming the Nation of Islam [would] urge the general

---

community, including other religious leaders, to demonstrate against this type of biased reporting.”159

After two meetings with editors of the Philadelphia Inquirer, during which the editors refused to retract the allegations made in the article on the Black Mafia, the Nation of Islam called for a boycott of the newspaper. On August 29th, over 500 Muslims and supporters began to picket in front of the Inquirer building, initiating the first street demonstrations held by the organization in Philadelphia. Several local, Black political and community leaders also participated in the street protests, urging all Philadelphians to rally behind the Nation of Islam; among them were mayoral candidate Charles Bowser, city councilman Lucien Blackwell, popular radio personality Georgie Woods, former state legislator Hardy Williams, and even white businessman Joe Fineburg. Minister Jeremiah Shabazz’s personal representative, Minister Refiq Id’deen, read a prepared statement, restating that the Inquirer article was “an attempt to undermine, discredit and malign the religious works of the Nation of Islam by associating Muhammad’s Temple of Islam Number 12 with crime.” Refiq Id’deen issued the standard defense of the Philadelphia mosque against accusations associating it with criminal activity, stating:

anytime a crime is committed by a Christian or Jew, religion is not brought into it. Yet on the other hand when an individual commits a crime and that person can be associated with any Muhammad’s Temple of Islam, in any way whatsoever, then their religion becomes paramount and an attempt is made to discredit the Nation of Islam. This is not done with Christians, Catholics, Jews or any

other religious group in America. . . This is an attempt to destroy the positive things [that the Muslims are doing in Philadelphia.]

Id'deen then listed three demands to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, which included;
1) a retraction of the Sunday article; 2) equal space for rebuttal of the alleged charges made against the Nation of Islam; 3) and an immediate end to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*'s practice of religious persecution against the Muslims and of printing erroneous information that is designed to malign and discredit the good works of Muhammad's Temple of Islam number 12, and other minority community groups involved in the uplift of their community. Representatives for the *Inquirer* insisted that they had invited the Nation's representatives to present a written rebuttal, which the editors would consider for publication, but the Muslims had not done so. The Muslims continued to protest for several days and urged other religious groups and independent citizens either to join their picket line or join in a letter writing campaign to the *Inquirer* condemning the article.¹⁶⁰

Despite the controversy surrounding the *Inquirer*'s article and the subsequent protests, the Philadelphia mosque's "International Muslim Unity Bazaar" was deemed a success, attracting an estimated 50,000 people, including political, business and educational leaders, and several entertainers. During the bazaar, Jeremiah Shabazz received a written proclamation honoring the Nation of Islam, signed by Mayor Frank Rizzo.¹⁶¹

But about three weeks later, controversy emerged once again to haunt the Muslims when local newspapers reported an FBI charge that "three men arrested

for kidnapping, extortion and allegedly trying to take over a major Black talent
booking agency” were acting on behalf of Philadelphia’s “Black Muslim”
leadership. The three men, Andrew Bradshaw, Freddie London, and Gregory
Turner were accused of kidnapping George Carey, president of Syndisc, Inc. and
“demanding a partnership in the firm.” According to one FBI agent, Turner—
who allegedly led the assault and proclaimed that he was a soldier in the Nation of
Islam--told Carey that the “Fruit of Islam” was taking over the city, and that all
independent businesses would have to pay tribute to them. Turner, the main
suspect accused of making these statements, denied all of the FBI’s charges and
persistently maintained his innocence. And a spokesman for the Nation of Islam
insisted:

We do not authorize or condone anyone doing anything illegal.
We are a religious group and will not condone illegal activities.
There is no such thing as a religious stickup, and we in no way
authorized this. Many people have claimed to be with us when
they are not. We’d have set up a whole department just to keep
track of those claiming to be with the Nation of Islam.162

During Turner’s eventual trial, several impressive character witnesses,
including Chuck Stone, a Black columnist for the Philadelphia Daily News, Dr.
Carl Allen Thomas, director of community services at Philadelphia Community
College, Masonic College instructor Reverend Randolph Jones (who was also
Turner’s brother-in-law), and Sherman Dozier and Robert Dawkins, two youth
counselors who worked with gang members, all vouched for him. Chuck Stone

161 “50,000 Attend Local Muslim Unity Bazaar,” Philadelphia Tribune 9 September 1975.
162 “Muslims Deny Role in Kidnapping Of Talent Booking Co. President,” Philadelphia Tribune
20 September 1975; “Black FBI Agent Tapes Threats Made to Owner Of Talent Agency Co.,”
Philadelphia Tribune 23 September 1975; “‘I’m Innocent,’ Says Convicted Kidnapper,”
had had extensive contact with Turner throughout 1974, when Stone was assisting Turner in writing a book on which he was working on with three young men. Turner's lawyer argued that Turner was actually a partner in Third World Contemporary Promotions, a company that promoted concerts, and that it was Carey—the alleged victim—who had actually contacted Turner with a business proposition. During an exclusive interview with the Philadelphia Tribune, Turner rebutted the statements that had been published in the local media and attributed to him by the FBI, maintaining that he had no relationship with the Black Mafia and never had. Turner emphasized that the "remarks about the Fruit of Islam and the Black Mafia came out of the mouths of police agents" and not him. After a jury convicted Turner of the crime, Turner still maintained his innocence, arguing, "it was certainly not a jury of my peers, there was only one Black on it, and they believed that the government wouldn't lie. It's hard to accept the fact that I face a life sentence over nothing, though. I still don't understand it." Regardless of whether Gregory Turner and his two alleged accomplices were actually Black Mafia members and guilty of the crime or just innocent pawns in some type of COINTELPRO induced scheme, the continuous, well-publicized recurrences of these alleged links with crimes, were beginning to distress many in the Nation of Islam.\footnote{\textit{"I'm Innocent," Phil. Trib. 27 Jan. 1976.}}

Under the new leadership of Wallace D. Muhammad, the Nation of Islam was attempting to broaden its appeal to larger Black, and white, secular communities, gain recognition and fraternity with the orthodox, Sunni Muslim
community, and even begin participating in electoral politics, which had been forbidden during Elijah Muhammad’s tenure. Wallace Muhammad’s 1976 announcement that the Nation of Islam would be permitted to engage in politics was especially electrifying. Many believed that the Muslim influence was strong enough in many of Philadelphia’s wards—especially in North Philadelphia—for them to be a significant political force. But during this time of expansion, the repeated allegations of criminal activity involving members of the mosque were becoming a chronic source of embarrassment for the organization, locally as well as nationally. The problem had grown to a point that it had to be addressed by Wallace D. Muhammad, himself.

In February of 1976, Philadelphia’s Black community was shocked when Minister Jeremiah Shabazz was suspended from his post as representative of the East Coast Region and minister of the Philadelphia’s Temple number 12. Wallace and the Nation of Islam were mute on the reason for Jeremiah’s suspension, but many speculated that it may have stemmed from a combination of the controversy surrounding the Philadelphia mosque and growing ideological disagreements between Jeremiah and Wallace. Some theorized that a “national clean-up campaign” was being waged by Wallace Muhammad “to change the Muslim image of its leadership being wearers of expensive clothes, drivers of elaborate cars, and elitists among their own general membership.” Others surmised that Jeremiah “may have been generally displeased with the sudden and extreme change in Muslim policy with regard to the admission of whites and the new attention paid to Malcolm X with the renaming of the New York Temple in
his honor.” 164 Wallace may have made too many changes for Jeremiah Shabazz, who some described as “an old-line, hard core Muslim.” Shortly after his demotion, Jeremiah resigned from the Nation of Islam, quitting the organization that he had been a member of for over twenty years. 165

Lending some credence to the idea that Jeremiah was suspended because of the mosque’s image as a haven for criminals, Minister Farrakhan—who was then still the national spokesman for Wallace Muhammad—charged that the Philadelphia mosque had been “maligned by the press because of the misdeeds of a few black sheep.” Farrakhan asserted that Philadelphia’s Temple number 12 was the strongest mosque in the country and that it was a “shame to see so many good people hurt by the actions of a bad few.” Subtly hinting that he considered Jeremiah Shabazz an inadequate leader, Farrakhan called Philadelphia a “moving town” and suggested that the mosque would move wherever it was led, stating, “If you put bad leadership here, it’ll move bad and if you put good leadership here, it’ll move good.” But regardless of which theory accurately explains Jeremiah Shabazz’s suspension and subsequent resignation, it is certain that, in spite of the Philadelphia mosque’s many successes, the constant association of the mosque with criminal activities, along with the embarrassment this caused the national organization, finally caught up with Jeremiah. 166

164 On January 25th, 1976, Wallace Muhammad renamed New York’s mosque to Malcolm Shabazz Mosque number 7, in honor of the late Malcolm X. This surprised many of the core members of the Nation of Islam since Malcolm X had been characterized as a traitor and enemy of the Nation.


Throughout 1976 and the rest of the decade, Wallace Muhammad proceeded on his mission to reform the Nation of Islam and transform it into a movement that was theologically and doctrinally compatible with the larger world of orthodox, Sunni Islam. Wallace’s ultimate goal was to reconstruct the entire image and makeup of the organization and change it from an institution that was essentially based in the classical African-American tradition of Black nationalism, into an institution that was concerned chiefly with adhering to the fundamental tenets and practices of Sunni Islam. Jeremiah Shabazz was not the only old-time member of the Nation of Islam to be discharged in the process. Most of the core top-level officials who had served closely under Elijah Muhammad were also removed and replaced with new administrators who were loyal to Wallace Muhammad. 167

Numerous other changes reinforce the idea that a new day had arrived. After revealing that the organization was actually 4.6 million dollars in debt and under a probe by the IRS, Wallace implemented new fiscal controls, brought its numerous businesses under one management team, and removed all local ministers from business operations. The “Fruit of Islam,” the Nation of Islam’s revered paramilitary division was abolished. The movement’s annual Savior’s Day observance—in honor of its founder, W.D. Fard, was renamed Survival Day, indicating Fard’s descent from divine status. The Nation’s temples, also referred to as mosques, were renamed to the Arabic designation of “masjids,” and the

ministers were subsequently designated as “imams.” Wallace began to advocate loyalty to the American government and mainstream American society and eliminated all forms of Black nationalist rhetoric and what he considered racism against whites. In 1976, the Nation of Islam was renamed “The World Community of Al-Islam in the West” (WCIW), and in 1980 it was renamed again to “The American Muslim Mission.” Wallace D. Muhammad’s efforts to gain international Islamic acceptance and recognition of his movement in America, culminated in 1985 when he stepped down as leader of the organization, explaining that true Islam had no centralized authority. Wallace Muhammad, who later changed his name to Warith Deen Mohammed, had successfully transformed the Nation of Islam from a messianic-nationalist, African-American religious sect to the largest Sunni Islamic community in America.168

Some pundits estimate that, at the Nation of Islam’s height during the early 1970s, there were about 10,000 active, registered members of the organization in Philadelphia although there are no available membership rosters to confirm this estimate. After the changes instituted by Warith Deen Mohammed (Wallace Muhammad), the general belief was that many former members left the movement, bringing the membership down to about 2,000 by 1978. There is no way to confirm this sharp decrease in membership, but there was definitely a widespread perception that the Muslims had disappeared. This perception may be due to the reality that many of the old, highly visible activities of the Nation of

---

168 Ibid.
Islam—such as the paramilitary “Fruit of Islam,” the mandatory selling of the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper, the annual Savior’s Day celebration, the local television program and other such expositions—had been abolished by 1978. The Muslims no longer seemed to have the same visible presence and force that they had during the time of Elijah Muhammad’s tenure. By the 1980s many high-profile members, including the popular Minister Farrakhan had defected from the new Sunni-oriented movement and either started new versions of the old Nation of Islam or left the Islamic religion altogether. No longer a highly-visible, Black nationalist religious movement, the former Nation of Islam had been transformed into a wholly spiritually based religious movement concerned primarily with the correct practice and theology of Sunni Islam.\(^{169}\)

Despite this period of low visibility and perceived disappearance during the 1980s, increasing numbers of Black Philadelphians were actually embracing the Sunni form of Islam that Warith Deen Mohammed had adopted. By 1981, there were an estimated 12,000 to 15,000 African-American Sunni Muslims in the city, which was a population significant enough to inspire Prince Muhammad al-Faisal of Saudi Arabia to consider opening a Philadelphia branch of his proposed Islamic Bank of New York. African-American Muslims began to refer to this period, during the 1980s, as “Islam’s second resurrection,” the “first resurrection” having occurred during the Nation of Islam’s ascendancy in the 1960s and 1970s. The various Muslim schools in Philadelphia were touted as a preferred alternative to the distressed public school system. They no longer taught the old teachings of

---


128
the Nation of Islam, but instead concentrated on discipline and a curriculum geared towards producing success in the mainstream American society.

Throughout the 1980s, African-American Sunni Muslims increasingly gained recognition as an accepted and normal segment of the general Black community.\textsuperscript{170}

By the 1990s, the image of the Muslims had clearly changed. Local media outlets featured stories on this increasingly visible segment of the local Black community and noted that this phenomenon, although reflecting national trends of high African-American conversion to Islam, was even more obvious in Philadelphia. Several high-profile Black political and community leaders were avowed Muslims, such as Bilal Qayyum—economic-development coordinator for the city Commerce Department and founder of the Father’s Day Rally Committee, Rashidah Hassan—the founder of BEBASHI, a nationally recognized organization formed to fight the spread of AIDS among Blacks, Sultan Jihad Ahmad—former head of the Mayor’s Office for Community Services, and Luqman Abdul Haqq (formerly Kenny Gamble)—distinguished songwriter, co-founder of Philadelphia International Records, and founder of Universal Companies.\textsuperscript{171}


In 1993, over 200 representatives of the city’s Muslim community petitioned the Philadelphia school board to recognize two Islamic holidays, Eid ul Fitr and Eid ul-Adha, arguing that about 25,000 of the district’s 200,000 students were Muslim or “Islamic.” By 1999, there were 34 Islamic mosques in Philadelphia, and dozens of halal restaurants, butcher shops, and mom-and-pop delis, mostly in predominantly African-American areas, that prepared food according to the dictates of Islamic dietary law. Philadelphia was accordingly chosen as the site for the 1999 Islamic Convention sponsored by Warith Deen Mohammed’s Muslim American society—the last such convention of the twentieth century. The convention attracted participants by the tens of thousands and broke previous records in attendance. The convention’s message focused on the need for economic development and empowerment in Muslim communities and inner-city neighborhoods instituted a plan to address these issues.  

Warith Deen Mohammed recognized Philadelphia’s importance as a center for his movement and the propagation of Islam in the United States. Recounting the consolidated history of his movement’s efforts in Philadelphia,

---


130
including the early years of the Nation of Islam under Elijah Muhammad's leadership, in a 1999 speech to a North Carolina audience, Mohammed stated that he had a "deep and personal interest in Philadelphia." According to Mohammed, Philadelphia was a city where the movement had established a large, sincere following along with several other cities, stating, "I believe Philadelphia has a place in our history. When our history is finished, Philadelphia is going to be a real star in our history. Chicago, Philadelphia, Newark, Washington, DC, Harlem, NY, are places where we have spent money, blood, etc. So these places have great meaning for us now and even greater meaning in the future."\(^{173}\)

Although the reestablished "Nation of Islam" founded by Minister Louis Farrakhan was very active in the city, its membership was dwarfed by the estimated 75,000 Blacks in the city who practiced orthodox Islam. Many African Americans who began to observe orthodox practices and beliefs rejected the Nation of Islam as a heretical group that misled Blacks and diverted them from the true message of Islam. Many Sunni Muslims also express hostility towards the current, revived versions of the old Nation of Islam, such as the organization led by Minister Louis Farrakhan. By no means, however, does this discount the influence of Farrakhan's movement in Philadelphia. Rodney Muhammad, minister of the revived Mosque number 12 and local representative of Louis Farrakhan, established a respected position in Philadelphia's Black community by the mid-1990s. Under the leadership of Minister Rodney Muhammad, the Farrakhan branch of the Nation of Islam has reestablished alliances and working

\(^{173}\) "Mohammed Speaks on Philadelphia in Kernersville, NC, July 31," Muslim Journal 17
relationships with an assorted conglomeration of grassroots activists, Black nationalists, African-American politicians, traditional organizations such as the NAACP, and even some elements of the Black Church. Although an underlying tension persists between local representatives of the Nation of Islam and orthodox Muslims, mainly because of theological differences, there is no evidence of serious hostility, and there appears to be a quiet truce and mutual respect.\textsuperscript{174}

Despite the negative attitude towards the Nation of Islam’s existence and contributions, the current prevalence of Islam among African Americans in Philadelphia and other cities is ultimately the legacy of Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X. It was Elijah Muhammad who most successfully reintroduced the concept of “Islam” to millions of African Americans through the organization that he built and directed over five decades. And it was Malcolm X who most zealously and effectively communicated this idea of Islam, while a member of the Nation of Islam and after his subsequent conversion to Sunni Islam. Without these two key figures, it is likely that current popularity of Islam would not be as great. C. Eric Lincoln states, it was under “Elijah Muhammad, [that] the Nation of Islam became the prevailing Islamic presence in America. It was not orthodox Islam, but it was by all reasonable judgements, proto-Islam; and therein lies a religious significance that may well change the course of history in the West.”

And highlighting the Nation of Islam’s importance, not only in its establishing the

September 1999.

\textsuperscript{174} Rodney Muhammad, the local Philadelphia representative of Louis Farrakhan’s Nation of Islam and minister of the reestablished Mosque number 12 had gained a recognized position in Philadelphia’s Black leadership community by the 1990s. Other than the restored Nation of Islam, there were other African-American Islamic sects—orthodox and heterodox—that were not part of
foundation for the current growth of Islam, but also as the one indigenous
African-American religion that most successfully challenged the traditional Black
Church. Theologian Louis A. DeCaro remarks, “The Black Muslims are not
merely an occurrence—nor even a remarkable occurrence on the landscape of
religious life in Black America—but perhaps the most successful religious
departure from classical Black Christianity originating within the community
itself.” 175
CONCLUSION

"Elijah Muhammad did not achieve orthodoxy for the Nation of Islam, but orthodoxy was not his goal. What he did achieve was a pronounced American awareness of Islam, its power and its potential. Because of him, there was a temple or mosque in a hundred cities where no mosques had existed before. There was a visible religious presence in the form of a hundred thousand Black Muslims—conspicuous in their frequent rallies and turnouts, and in their little groceries and restaurants and bakeries and other small businesses. The clean-shaven young Muslims hawking their newspapers on the streets, celebrating their rituals in the prisons, debating their beliefs in the media gave to the religion of Islam a projection and a prominence undreamed of in North America.... Under Elijah Muhammad, the Nation of Islam became the prevailing Islamic presence in America...."

--C. Eric Lincoln

In "Judeo-Christian" America, Islam, the world's fastest growing religion, has now surpassed Judaism as the second largest religion in the United States. Although many American Muslims are immigrants from Islamic societies, African Americans make up nearly half of this religious community and comprise nearly 90 percent of new, domestic converts. There is no official count of the total number of African Americans who are believers in Islam, but estimates of the numbers range from between 1.5 and 4.5 million. The differences in these estimates may depend on whether believers in various "proto-Islamic" sects are included in the counts, or only those who are believers in orthodox Islam. In any case, C. Eric Lincoln notes estimates that several million Black people,
predominantly Black men, "have passed through" the various "Islamic and proto-Islamic" movements that have existed in the United States. The existence of this large body of Muslims has important implications for the intraracial social relations in the Black community and the larger religious and ethnic relations within the general American society. ¹⁷⁶

Although some observers minimize the consequences of Islam's presence in the Black community, C. Eric Lincoln's asserted that the international growth of Islam will eventually influence the "general religious situation in the United States" and Black Christian churches in particular. Lincoln regards the phenomenon as a very significant development in the community's religious culture:

[T]he possibility of a serious impact on the Black Church cannot be peremptorily dismissed. The phenomenon of more black males preferring Islam while more black females adhere to traditional black Christianity is not as bizarre as it sounds. It is already clear that in Islam the historic black church denominations will be faced with a far more serious and more powerful competitor for the souls of black folk than the white churches ever were. When is the question, not whether.

Lincoln contends that "Islam has proven itself to be a viable religious alternative" to Black Christian churches, especially for Black men, a segment of the Black population that many churches have experienced difficulties in recruiting. ¹⁷⁷

The implications for the general religious situation in the United States relate to Islam's position as the world's most rapidly expanding belief system. Scholar John L. Esposito confirms Islam's global importance stating that "Islam

¹⁷⁶ Lincoln and Mamiya, 390.
¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 390, 391.
constitutes the most pervasive and powerful international force in the world, with one billion adherents spread across the globe. Muslims are the majority in some forty-five countries ranging from Africa to Southeast Asia, and they exist in growing and significant numbers in the United States, the Soviet Union, and Europe.” Since the fall of communism, many in the West have focussed on the rise of “Islamic fundamentalism” as a new international threat. The prospect of a global ideological force “embracing one fifth of the world’s population,” is a source of concern for those who expected an unhindered ascendency of Western oriented socio-cultural ideals and politico-economic systems. The growing Islamic community in the United States will, potentially, influence America’s policy toward the various nations in the Islamic world.\textsuperscript{178}

As Islam continues to establish its place in America, its function in the African-American community and in the general society must be examined more thoroughly. Religion fulfills the African-American need for a coherent identity. Islam has served this function for multitudes of its converts throughout the globe. Examining the impact of modernity on societies where Islam has experienced its most impressive revival, John L. Esposito observes that the rapid, international processes of urbanization, sociocultural change, and the global inundation of Western values disrupted age-old societies and cultural systems, resulting in “psychological as well as physical displacement:”

\begin{quote}
Loss of village, town, and extended family ties and traditional values were accompanied by the shock of modern urban life and its Westernized culture and mores. Many, swept along in a sea of...
\end{quote}

alienation and marginalization, found anchor in religion. Islam offered a sense of identity, fraternity, and cultural values that offset the psychological dislocation and cultural threat of their new environment (italics added).

These processes experienced by many Muslim converts in other countries, certainly is analogous to the types of dislocation experienced by African American in their own rapid process of displacement, migration, and urbanization, during most of the twentieth-century. The same need for a sense of “identity, fraternity, and cultural values” that Islam provides to many in the rapidly changing societies in the Islamic world, is what has drawn many African Americans to Islam.

The various African-American Islamic movements, whether proto-Islamic or orthodox, have provided African-American converts with a new identity and culture in a society that had historically denied their very humanity. The historical tensions and conflicts between African Americans in proto-Islamic movements and orthodox Islamic movements are based on a fundamental disagreement of where this identity should be focussed. Aminah Beverly McCloud’s analysis of the ‘asabiya and ummah concepts highlights this division.

Understanding the tension between these two key concepts is crucial to understanding the nature and development of African-American Islam in this century. African-American Islamic communities can be understood and differentiated largely by whether they grant priority to nation-building, on the one hand, or to experience of the ummah and participation in the world Islamic community, on the other... In the first half of the twentieth century most African-American Islamic communities focus on 'asabiya, operating on the premise that the primary need for African Americans is development of a historically grounded national identity outside the confines of mainstream American society. In the second half to the century, however, this focus on 'asabiya is banded as heretical by many Muslims at home and
abroad, and we find that many African-American Islamic communities begin to prioritize the *ummah*.

The ideological disagreements between Imam Warith Deen Muhammad’s orthodox, Sunni movement and Minister Louis Farrakhan’s revived version of the Nation of Islam epitomize this conflict in the larger African-American Islamic movement.¹⁷⁹

The history of Islam’s evolution in Philadelphia shows a specific case of this religion’s development in a specific Black community. The Great Migration produced a social milieu in which many alternative forms of religious expression began to proliferate among the city’s Blacks, including a proto-Islamic movement named the Moorish Science Temple. Later, in the context of the city’s postwar urban crisis and the rise of the Black Power movement, another proto-Islamic sect named the Nation of Islam rose to prominence. In 1975, after the death of Elijah Muhammad, the Nation of Islam’s leader, his son Wallace D. (later Warith Deen) Muhammad took over the movement and led it to the path of orthodox Sunni Islam, creating the largest number of Black Sunni Muslims in the United States. Though, Black nationalistic, proto-Islamic groups, such as the Louis Farrakhan’s Nation of Islam, the Ansaru Allah Community, and the Five Percent Nation, also remained active in Philadelphia, by the 1990s, of all major cities, Philadelphia’s Black community contained the largest proportion of African-American Sunni Muslims in the United States.

As African Americans move into the twentieth century, alternative belief systems including indigenous African forms of spirituality, Buddhism, Black
Judaism, and others, increasingly attract African Americans. But Islam remains by far, the most successful non-Christian religious movement in the Black community. Future research must continue to address issues relevant to this socio-cultural/religious development by examining in more detail issues involving gender, generation, socio-economic influences, relations between African-American and Immigrant Muslims, relations between African-American Islam and popular Black ideologies such as Afrocentricity, and many other questions that examine the culture and lifestyles of the Black community. Although this particular thesis has examined a small aspect of a much larger topic, the information that it contributes adds more data to a body of knowledge that will continue to expand as research progresses.

179 McCloud, 4, 5.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books Referenced


*Dissertations and Theses Referenced*


*Magazines Articles Referenced*


*Newspapers Referenced*