Wallace Deen Muhammad and the transformation of the black Muslim world view

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The Black Muslims world view as defined by Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam (NOI) faithfully reflected the hostile ghetto environment in which they lived. It was parochial, authoritarian and «racist», just like the NOI's organizational structure and belief system.

The steady improvement of the Black Muslims' living conditions under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad undermined the belief system he had painfully elaborated over the years and gradually prepared his followers for membership into the world Muslim community whose universalistic world view reflected more faithfully the newly acquired status of (black) Muslims in the larger American society. Upon Elijah's death in 1975 his heir Wallace Deen Muhammad whose view of humanity had been broadened by his exposure to orthodox Islam in the Sixties had no problem leading his father's followers on the path of Prophet Muhammad.

This paper explores the relation between the Black Muslims world view and the ghetto environment, and argues that the demise of this world view was brought about by the improvement of the Black Muslims' living conditions and by the changing constituency of the NOI. It also discusses the transformation of the NOI into the World Community of Al-Islam in the West (WCIW), which changed its name to the American Muslim Mission (AMM) in April, 1980, and its adoption of a universalistic world view(1).

(1) Data for this paper are drawn primarily from written sources generated by the movements themselves or by the numerous students of the NOI and supplemented with my own
The Nation of Islam

The numerous studies dealing with the origins of the NOI\(^{(2)}\) have not succeeded in dispelling the mystery which still surrounds the origins of the movement. They have, however, made it abundantly clear that the ghetto environment in which it was born contributed a great deal to its organizational structure and its belief system.

The origin of the NOI goes back to a «mysterious silk peddler» who started plying his trade in the black ghetto in Detroit in 1930. This peddler was known under different names, the most common of which was Fard Muhammad; he told his customers that he was a «brother come from the East» to teach them about their great past, their true religion and their true identity. The blacks, he said, were not Negroes, but «Asiatics» whose origins went back to the tribe of Shabazz whose members, he claimed, still lived around the holy city of Macca. The blacks, he preached, were a lost nation—lost to their «brothers» in the East, and lost to themselves because they had forgotten their true identity.

Fard Muhammad made such an efficient use of the Detroit ghetto environment—its racism, unemployment and sickness—that by 1933, he had managed to build a viable organization. The NOI had its own flag to which its members pledged allegiance, rather than to the U.S. flag; it had its own defense and security force, the Fruit of Islam, staffed by all its able-bodied members, and its own University of Islam, an elementary school, to train its future leaders. The NOI also organized adult education classes where its members were introduced to «their» great heritage. Women were taught to uphold the dignity of their sex as mothers and wives, and were instructed in housekeeping techniques in the Moslem Girls' Training and General Civilization Classes.

The white man, and American racism were branded as the chief cause of all the ills from which the ghetto populations suffered. The white man’s behavior, Fard Muhammad pointed out, was evil because the white man was a devil. Only a devil, he said, would deprive other human beings of their true identity, religion and language—Islam and Arabic. Only a devil was capable of so much evil\(^{(3)}\).

observations during my three-year acquaintance with the Philadelphia Muslims. Written materials dealing with the NOI are numerous, though dated, since most of them were published in the 1960s. The WCIW. on the other hand, has failed to generate a similar interest from either the academic community or the mass media.


(3) Ibid.
By 1933, the NOI was so well organized that Fard Muhammad was able to withdraw from active leadership and turn the movement over to one of his most dedicated converts, Minister Elijah (Poole) Muhammad, who had emigrated from Georgia ten years earlier. Prophet Fard Muhammad, as he had come to be known, disappeared from sight in June 1934, and Elijah Muhammad, almost single-handedly, set about deifying him after having driven into secession Abdul Muhammad who favored allegiance to the American flag and Constitution.

Elijah Muhammad stressed militancy and preached a total separation from the dominant culture. His move merely elevated a *fait accompli* to the level of ideology, and its only originality resided in the fact that he accepted segregation from the white community and considered it a sure way to prevent his people’s «superiority» from being corrupted by any intercourse with the «white devils». To sever all ties with the whites, Muhammad said, would enable the blacks to preserve their newly found divine identity. Elijah Muhammad also taught that Fard Muhammad was Allah come to America to lead his Chosen People out of their exile and restore them to their rightful position as masters of the universe, including their white oppressors.

Having deified Fard Muhammad, Elijah saw fit to don the mantle of Allah’s Messenger and continue articulating the belief system he had inherited (or won) with the NOI. Elijah Muhammad claimed that he was the only legitimate leader of the NOI because, of all the prophets, he was the only one who had actually lived with God. This claim was defended by countless Black Muslim apologists including Malcolm X, Louis Farrakhan and by the NOI official theologian, Bernard Cushmeer (4). Cushmeer argued that neither Jesus nor Muhammad of Arabia received the whole truth from God; only Elijah Muhammad did.

Elijah taught his followers that their suffering in America at the hands of the white man was part of a divine plan, and part of a larger struggle between Allah and Yakub, an evil black scientist who created the white man from the weakest part of a black man. The white man, he said, would rule the world for 6,000 years, until the year 2000 A.D., when his reign would end, and the blacks would take over. Allah, in the person of Fard Muhammad had come among his people to signal the beginning of the end of white domination. «The black man is the first and last, maker and owner of the universe.» (5) said Elijah Muhammad. Who urged his followers to get ready for the Battle of Armageddon where Allah would fight for them.

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(4) Bernard Cushmeer. *This is the One: Messenger Elijah Muhammad*, 1971.
To get ready to assume their new position and superior status in the world, the Black Muslims had to break with the ghetto subculture value system which hindered their progress. To answer the call of Allah, they should show discipline, work hard, shun alcohol and fornication and build strong families and businesses. To regain their lost dignity and identity, they should rise up from the dead and stop getting bung up on the «spook» (other-worldly) notion of heaven. Man is matter. Elijah claimed, as can be easily ascertained from the presence of Allah in human form among blacks and heaven is a condition attainable in this world, a «condition the white man now has.»

Blacks in general, and Black Muslims in particular, urged Elijah Muhammad, should dissociate themselves from the life-styles of the so-called Negro and put an end to their feelings of self-hatred, self-denigration and self-rejection. They should discover their true identity which is rooted in Islam and take pride in their closeness to Allah. The black man’s culture is not the hated ghetto culture, but a once-lost Muslim heritage, which Allah was revealing to his resurrected children. Alienation, deprivation and social estrangement, Elijah taught, were not the lot of blacks, but a condition imposed on them by the «devils»: the lot of the Black Muslims was mastery over the universe.

Black Muslims were instructed to stop debasing their divine nature by such acts as the straightening of hair, gambling, disrespect for their women and leaders, the use of intoxicants, ghetto food (later known as soul food) and foul speech. Moreover, Black Muslims were required to help their brethren and restore Allah’s «natural order» by establishing strong, male-dominated families.

Elijah Muhammad spread his ideas from the pulpits of his Temples, during rallies and in columns, articles and interviews most of which found their way in print, and were later published in book form. He made extensive use of such regional newspapers as the Los Angeles Herald-Dispatch, the Chicago New Crusader, and the Pittsburg Courier, before he started his own newspaper, Muhammad Speaks, in 1960. His various columns and articles were required reading for his followers, and were furthermore subjected to close study in the NOI temples, and schools.

The first NOI school, the University of Islam, was founded in Detroit in 1932 and the second one opened its doors in Chicago two years later. The University of Islam remained a tuition free primary school until 1953 when secondary school level courses were added: modest fees were required in

1959. In early 1972, the NOI was operating schools, most of which were accredited by the regional accreditation boards, in 14 cities(7).

The University of Islam aimed at providing a black education for blacks and by blacks. Elijah Muhammad claimed that these schools were universities because they provided total instruction to the Black Muslim child, and did not merely teach the basics like other parochial schools. The University of Islam taught blacks about their «heritage», and prepared them for their great future by teaching them the necessary skills to achieve mastery over their universe.

Elijah Muhammad’s teachings(8) were designed to help the Black Muslims transcend their minority status, free them from the need to deal with white racism and neutralize the ghetto subculture value system as well as channel their energies towards coping with life under the aggravating conditions of life in the urban ghettos. In Essien-Udom’s words, the NOI provided the «opportunity for individuals who seek associations and identification that inspire and legitimize their desire for social mobility.»(9) It also provided a «solution» to the blacks’ dilemma of having to choose between being black and being American by suggesting total separation from white America and preaching total commitment to Allah.

The Growth of the Nation of Islam

The Nation of Islam flourished in part because of the improving economic conditions of blacks, in part because of the publicity given the movement, and in part because of the dynamism of the civil rights movement in the Sixties.

After the secession of Abdul Muhammad from the NOI in 1934, Elijah Muhammad moved the headquarters of his tiny but dedicated organization to Chicago. Although he met with little success in attracting many followers in Chicago, he was a given a chance to affirm his leadership and preach his beliefs to a captive and receptive audience when he was committed to prison in Milan, Michigan on charges of draft dodging in 1942 — he was 41 when he was arrested. To his fellow prisoners Elijah’s discussion of the white

(8) For a detailed exposition of the Nation of Islam’s belief system see particularly, Elijah Muhammad. Message to the Blackman in America ; Essien-Udom, Black Nationalism ; Eric Lincoln. The Black Muslims in America ; Malcolm X. The Autobiography of Malcolm X ; Louis Farrakhan. Seven Speeches ; Bernard Cushmeer. This is the One.
(9) Essien-Udom. op. cit., p. 109
man's centuries-old oppression of blacks, and the future rewards awaiting
the black race had a ring of truth and prophecy.

Necessity had provided Elijah with a receptive and informative audience.
and he left prison in 1946 with a wealth of information about those who
were victims of racist laws. Prison populations, even more than their ghetto
counterparts, had a first hand knowledge of racism and oppression. Despite
his insights, however, Elijah Muhammad did not actively seek new
members; he believed that the blacks' experience in America was eloquent
enough to make them flock to his temples.

Continuous police harassment, and Elijah's own caution kept the NOI
hemmed in within the black ghetto confines until Malcolm (Little) X
revolutionized the movement's approach to recruitment of followers.

MalcolmLittle joined the NOI in 1952 because of his deep conviction of
the soundness of Elijah Muhammad's ideas concerning the race problem in
America. It was his belief that the black man's suffering was about to be
relieved by Allah, and his first-hand knowledge of the many forms of racism
in America, that led him to take an active part in the salvation of the blacks
on this earth. Malcolm X's active membership drives led to the addition of
25 temples to the Nation's existing 10 institutions and his eloquence gave
the NOI a world-wide reputation.¹¹°

Elijah's call on the Federal Government in the late 1950s to provide the
blacks in America with a separate homeland¹¹¹ as damages for four
centuries of slavery and exploitation, and Malcolm X's treatment at the
hands of the mass-media, exacerbated the fears and suspicion of the white
and black establishments who were afraid the civil-rights movement would
get out of hand if it were to come under the influence of the Black Muslim
ideology. Adverse publicity did, however, attract many blacks to the NOI
by giving sensational coverage to its leaders and their ideas.

Although most of the NOI's critics credited its leader with the ability to
reclaim and rehabilitate the ghetto derelicts, the drug addicts, the alcoholics
and prostitutes,¹² they were quick to suggest that Elijah was surrounded

(10) For a full discussion of Malcolm X's role in the growth of the NOI see particularly Peter
X, op. cit.
(11) American blacks have sought to establish their own state ever since Toussaint
L'Ouverture founded a black republic in the Caribbean. Both Blyden and Garvey sought
a similar goal; and recently, in 1969, Imari Abubakari Obadele organized the
Republic of New Africa in the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and
South Carolina.
Black Experience : Soul, Lee Rainwater, ed.
with a group of potentially dangerous criminals, and that, therefore, the pathological tendencies of the movement had to be checked. To his followers, Elijah Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, miraculously healed the wounds of his people and helped them regain their lost dignity. William McCord suggests, however, that the members of the NOI did not come from among the lowest members of the ghetto subculture, but were drawn rather from a group of people who believed they could shape their own destinies if only they joined the right organization. These groups McCord refers to as «cultist stoics,» «activists,» and «revolutionaries.»

He suggests, therefore, that although most of the NOI's members were social outcasts struggling on the margins of society, they were psychologically sound despite the harmful effects of racism and deprivation.

The NOI owes its fame primarily to the exertions of the charismatic and articulate Malcolm X, who kept it in the limelight through his numerous TV and radio appearances and lectures. Malcolm was a forceful speaker who called for a quick and radical improvement of the black's lot; he had only withering contempt for gradualism and reformism. He wanted dignity and justice for his people, and suggested that these goals had to be achieved by any means necessary. Malcolm was to become the second most popular speaker on the lecture circuit in America after Barry Goldwater, but the fame he brought to the NOI was, in fact, a succès de scandale, which left the mass media free to slander the NOI and confuse the civil-rights movement.

The popularity of Malcolm X was real enough and ominous enough to scare Elijah, the Messenger of Allah, into «ex-communicating» his valuable and once trusted National Minister. It was clear to Elijah that the time had come to neutralize the still devoted but potentially dangerous challenger, who was urging a more active role for the Black Muslims in the ongoing civil-rights struggle. Malcolm X felt, during his last year as a Black Muslim, that the NOI had to adopt a more militant, even revolutionary stance in the struggle for the black man's dignity. He was to suggest later that blacks should adopt a revolutionary ideology, which alone could help them secure their human rights; he argued that once blacks achieved their human rights, the struggle for civil rights would become irrelevant.

Malcolm X had begun to travel a highway which had nothing of the narrowness of Elijah Muhammad's path towards black self-sufficiency; he had come to realize that his mentor's parochialism was too narrow to achieve any significant gains for the blacks in America. (14)


(14) For a comprehensive discussion of Malcolm X's spiritual and ideological growth refer to the works dealing with Malcolm X which are listed here below.
Muhammad, one of Elijah's sons, had also reached the same conclusion, but his solution to this problem, as we shall see later on, had more modest and ultimately realizable objectives.

Unlike Elijah Muhammad, whose world was restricted to the ghetto environment during the Depression and later and whose contacts were largely limited to the rural Southern migrants newly arrived in the urban North, Malcolm X gradually broadened his world view through his continuous interaction with the larger American society particularly with students and revolutionary world leaders. Very early in the Sixties, Malcolm started recruiting into the NOI urban youths who shared his views and who were impatient with Elijah Muhammad's parochial belief system. While continuing to preach Elijah's <<racist>> belief system, Malcolm forged ahead in an attempt to join forces with revolutionary leaders the world over. Elijah viewed the black's dilemma from within the ghetto, whereas Malcolm, whose world view had broadened considerably since his first few years as a Black Muslim, believed that racism and white domination had to be challenged on the international scene. Elijah sought development for the Blacks within the framework of a racist society; Malcolm, on the other hand, sought to destroy this oppressive framework in its totality.

In the mid-sixties, these two conflicting world views coexisted within the NOI whose official stance stressed Elijah's views at the expense of Malcolm X's. The partisans of Malcolm X often stifled their yearning for the solidarity of «the wretched of the earth» or dropped out of the NOI.

Malcolm's influence in the Nation's affairs was so great that the Black Muslims, and the larger ghetto communities as well as the white observers of the movement had come to identify the NOI with him. The NOI, therefore, appeared to be bursting with energy and determination to overthrow the white power structure. In fact, the NOI was, ideologically, more like Elijah than like Malcolm: its «radicalism» was to remain unfulfilled since it was designed mainly for consumption within the movement. Elijah Muhammad was interested in building a self-sustaining organization-and he had managed to do so. Malcolm's interaction with the larger American society in the early sixties had convinced him that it was high time for the Nation to take a more active role in the black man's struggle against racism. Discussing this point with a long-time acquaintance, Louis Lomax, he said: «The Messenger has seen God. He was with Allah and was given divine patience with the devil. He is willing to wait for Allah to deal with this devil. The rest of us Black Muslims have not seen God, we don't have this gift of divine patience with the devil. the younger
Black Muslims want to see some action.\(^{(15)}\)

Elijah Muhammad silenced Malcolm X, and «excommunicated» his own son, Wallace D. Muhammad, thus making clear to his followers his commitment to his parochial world view and his determination to crush both religious and political dissent. He was also signalling to America his unwillingness to go beyond the rhetoric he had so painstakingly articulated and that he would neither initiate nor condone any violence towards white America. His message was widely heard within the movement, but was mostly ignored by the mass-media leaders whose hunger for sensational stories prevented them from acknowledging the peaceful nature of his rhetoric. Elijah preached the total destruction of the «white devils», but practised a cautious form of coexistence with white Americans through his careful manipulation of the notion of alienation. The academic community, except for Eric Lincoln, took full notice of Muhammad's stance in the civil-rights struggle, but its voice was not heard outside the nation's university campuses.

The history of the NOI until Elijah Muhammad's death in February 1975 shows a curious but understandable mixture of apocalyptic rhetoric, and a prudent, conservative and reformist approach to the black man's dilemma. While urging the blacks to separate from whites, Elijah Muhammad actually indicated that his undeclared goal was a full integration in America, as can be ascertained from a brief examination of the «Muslim Program.»\(^{(16)}\)

This program demands freedom, equal justice under the law, equality of opportunity, an end to police brutality, equal employment opportunities, equal education, and exemption from taxes in America. The discrepancy between word and deed in the NOI was so great that it could no longer be ignored after the Messenger's death.

Before his death in 1975, Elijah Muhammad led a movement whose involvement in America was so important that no one could take his call for separation at its face value. The NOI had grown into a conglomerate with significant (for the movement) investments in agribusiness, food distribution, clothing, imports, real estate, publishing, light technology, transportation, health services, schools and temples.\(^{(17)}\) The call for segregated development, served, then, other purposes than the ones professed by Elijah Muhammad.

\(^{(15)}\) Quoted in *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, op. cit., pp. 93-94. Italics mine.
\(^{(16)}\) «The Muslim Program.» in all the issues of *Muhammad Speaks*, 1960-1974.
If the various investments of the NOI made it appear like a conglomerate its organizational structure was that of a family business, with all the power concentrated in the hands of the Messenger. Elijah Muhammad ran his Nation, from its headquarters in Chicago, with a firm hand, and a keen eye to profits and solvency both of which were attainable thanks to the high unemployment which prevailed in the ghetto. He was able to keep his local businesses from going under thanks to the benevolent services of his followers. Elijah directly controlled the ministers of his 80 temples, who were directly responsible to him, just like the captains of the Fruit of Islam. While the Nation was run by Elijah Muhammad from Chicago, the local temples were run by a minister seconded by a secretary and a treasurer, and by the captain of the Fruit of Islam. The minister looked after spiritual and secular matters, including the local businesses, the sale of the Nation's newspaper and the local branch of the University of Islam; the captain, seconded by junior officers, dealt with security matters including the members' morals and discipline. A couple of «investigators», a man and a woman, made sure that the believers did not stray from Muhammad's path. Characterized by highly personalistic control, the organizational structure thus reflected both the authoritarianism and the context-specific parochialism of the world view of the Black Muslims. These two features were further reinforced by the socialization process through which blacks became part of the Nation of Islam.

The Socialization of the Black Muslims

Conversion to Islam was a never-ending process which started with the follower's acceptance within the Nation. Faith in the Messenger had to be reaffirmed daily through a close adherence to Elijah Muhammad's belief system, and intense participation in the socialization process. This process involved the convert in a variety of activities including temple attendance, membership in the Fruit of Islam for men, and enrollment in the Muslim Girls' Training and General Civilization classes for women.

Temple activities for the Nation's members were scheduled three times a week during which the converts worshipped and received instruction in spiritual and ideological matters, and renewed their commitment to the Messenger. All able-bodied men were expected to participate in the Fruit of Islam training program which included religion, close order drill, martial

(18) Up to 1961, Muhammad's ministers had enjoyed supreme authority over their temple affairs, but an administrative decree issued that year made the temple captains (of the Fruit of Islam) answerable to the Messenger alone.
arts, and how to sell *Muhammad Speaks*. Women, on the other hand, were taught how to be better mothers and wives.

Discipline, the major component of the program, was further reinforced through stringent dietary requirements which banned a number of foods and urged the faithful to do with one meal a day. Ascetism was also reinforced through the yearly one month-long fast.

This socialization process aimed at reinforcing group identity and homogeneity rather than producing orthodox Muslims. Despite its cautious support for the Nation of Islam, the world Muslim Community never totally accepted the Black Muslims as full members.\(^{(19)}\)

### The Black Muslim’s World View

Elijah Muhammad made a highly selective use of the ghetto ecology to which he added a millenarian ideology based on the promise of the black man’s impending victory over his white oppressors to forge a new identity and world view for his followers.

The Black Muslim\(^{(20)}\) considered America an alien and hostile environment, whose society and institutions conspired to keep him down among «the wretched of the earth.» His life experiences in the urban ghettos and the history of his race convinced him that the white man’s sins against him were so damning that nothing short of total destruction of white America would satisfy Allah.

The Black Muslim, who had seen only the blackest face of white America, as revealed by its racism and exploitation, believed that the white man’s behavior revealed his utter depravity and devilish nature. For him the white man was a devil whose jealousy of the black man’s divine nature was boundless. The Black Muslim believed that he had been «resurrected» by Allah himself, and that he was a member of God’s Chosen People, who were to rule the world after the fateful Battle of Armageddon, and live in bliss ever after in an earthly paradise, in America. He had no doubt that total separation from the corrupt white society was a necessity, and that the white man himself envied him his faith, and grudgingly respected him for upholding it.\(^{(21)}\) He knew that Allah was on his side, and that his survival

\(^{(19)}\) See Eric Lincoln’s *The Black Muslims* and Essien-Udom’s *Black Nationalism*.

\(^{(20)}\) We are referring here only to those Black Muslims who were totally committed to Elijah Muhammad’s world view. Not included are those members of the Nation of Islam, who for one reason or another disagreed with Elijah, and who invariably left the movement. We do understand, however, that even among the committed faithful various constellations of belief are likely to have developed.

and whatever success he experienced were a proof of Allah's watchfulness over him. He felt superior to all his black brothers who were still in the dark. and to all whites. He felt a deep sense of pride in his blackness — Muslim blackness, that is —, in his life-style and his proximity to Allah's (Fard) formidable center of power.

The Black Muslim lived in a sacred world. The times he lived in, the space he moved in, his institutions, his family and his activities had been made holy by Allah (Fard) himself. The sacralization(22) of his world by Allah created an absolute reality, which transcended the actual reality of his world, and thus protected him from the dangers of his ghetto environment while suggesting total mastery over it. His activities were valorized regardless of their nature: his dress, his diet, his family life and general life-style were sacred as long as he conformed to Elijah Muhammad's interpretation of divine wisdom.(23)

The outsider's denigration of his belief system and life-style, he felt, only revealed his profane nature. His behavior was determined by «real» time as opposed to actual time, and thus was invested with a high degree of efficacy. He believed that he was assured success, and that failure, no matter how severe, was nothing more than a temporary setback, or at best a trial. His environment was to be used as a backdrop to success: it was something to conquer and transcend. He believed that his superiority over others was decreed by Allah Himself, and was not a false claim made by mortals for the sake of selfish, worldly gains. He, therefore, rejected any comparison with the Ku Klux Klan or with the Nazis that his critics were wont to make.

This world-view insulated the Black Muslim from the world in which he lived. Besides, his daily activities were orchestrated by Elijah Muhammad in such a way that he had little or no opportunity to interact with the larger society — such interaction being considered unholy, unhealthy and unnecessary. It is worth noting that the Black Muslims who were not totally cut off from the larger American society often outgrew the parochialism of the NOI and either integrated their forsaken black communities, sought membership in orthodox Muslim groups, or joined various civil-rights organizations. The Black Muslim's world-view served him effectively in his attempts to break free from the ghetto's value system, and help him confront racism.

(22) See Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, 1959, for a discussion of the uses of the sacred.
(23) Elijah Muhammad gave out precise and comprehensive instructions concerning various aspects of the Black Muslims' life-styles in How to Eat to Live and Message to the Blackman.
But if ideological and physical segregation were sought and achieved, economic implantation in the ghetto, and outside it, were no less encouraged and practised. The Nation’s businesses and temples were established in the American environnement, but their physical presence was denied, so to speak, by the ideology of the movement. The Black Muslims believed they were in the ghetto but not part of it; their businesses, schools and temples were sacred establishments, and were thus removed from this environment.

Because he believed in his sacredness, the Black Muslim saw no contradiction between his desire to remove himself from America and strengthen his economic base within it. The Black Muslim did not suspect that he was «integrating» himself in American society, and that in his rebelliousness, was showing more respect for the country’s laws and work ethic because his eyes were resolutely fixed on the ideal of total separation, and his heart wished for nothing less that the total destruction of his, and Allah’s (Fard’s) enemies.

The Black Muslim lived in a state of siege, and developed a siege mentality. His businesses were his castles, and his temples blockhouses where Allah’s weapons — the Truth he had revealed to Elijah — were polished for the fateful day when the white man’s reign was to run its course. Believing that he was besieged by the forces of evil, he was nevertheless certain his enemies would fail in their attempts to subjugate him. Security was, therefore, extraordinarily tight in and around the Nation’s establishments, and a state of tense readiness pervaded the atmosphere wherever the faithful met.

The Black Muslims’ normal life was seen in terms of constant warfare, a condition they shared with their ghettoized black brothers who were constantly engaged in the business of «makin’ it against the Man.» but their «readiness» was only a smokescreen behind which they waited for Allah to come and wipe out their enemies, while they engaged in the mundane task of tending their retail stores and chicken farms, and watched some of them grow into respectable businesses. But, if the rank and file in the NOI were busy manning the barricades, the national leadership, and most of the local ministers were busy enjoying the good life in the earthly paradise they had carved in America’s ghettos.

The Passing of the Nation of Islam

Elijah Muhammad, the self-appointed Messenger of Allah, died on February 25, 1975, and the following day his son, Wallace D. Muhammad, was annointed Chief Minister of the NOI to the obvious displeasure of some of the most prominent officers of the movement. Wallace’s succession
paved the way for fundamental changes in the belief system and the organizational structure of the movement, both of which moved the Black Muslims into the mainstream of Orthodox Islam.

Wallace D. Muhammad had, after all, been expelled from the Nation by the Messenger himself, and labelled a «hypocrite» when he made public his objections to the corruption he had witnessed among the leadership of the movement. Wallace had ridiculed his father’s claims to prophethood, and had granted several interviews «charging members of his father’s court with high crimes ranging from smoking and fornication to misusing the Nation’s wealth.»

The Old Guard was worried by Wallace D. Muhammad’s accession to the highest position in the NOI, but refrained from declaring its hostility openly for about a year. It was only when Wallace showed his determination to erect a new organization on the shambles of the NOI, and refurbish Elijah Muhammad’s belief system, and when the Old Guard’s loss of both status and power became certain that it broke with him and declared him and unrepenting «hypocrite.»

Cautiously but swiftly, Wallace started putting into practice the ideas he had acquired in the early sixties when he was outside the NOI. He declared upon his investiture that he had been «born for the mission,» and that his role was «to see to it that Islam (was) constantly and continually being renewed.» He also argued that «the teachings of Wallace Fard Muhammad and the Honorable Elijah Muhammad (had) prepared (the Black Muslims) for the Second Resurrection,» since the First Resurrection.


(25) Louis Farrakhan, the National Minister of the NOI and the spokesman of Elijah from 1964 to 1975, and other influential ministers such Avery X, Defense Minister of the movement, severed all ties with Wallace D. Muhammad early in 1976. Farrakhan declared himself the spiritual heir of the Messenger and called on the die-hard Black Muslims to help him rebuild the NOI. But so far he has failed in his heroic attempts to breathe new dynamism into his aging followers. He started publishing a monthly tabloid in May, 1979 and broadcasting his «Messages of Wisdom» on a dozen radio stations and publishing a weekly column in about a dozen publications. Farrakhan urges his listeners to help him restore the Nation of Islam to its pristine form. He has managed to regroup a number of influential Black Muslims including Bernard Cushmeer but has failed to overcome the parochial ambitions of many local ministers.

Avery X., former Minister of Defense of the NOI, on the other hand, has not spared Wallace D. Muhammad. He labelled him «Chief Hypocrite,» and declared open war on him, on Louis Farrakhan and a host of other prominent members of the Nation. Avery X., in a flyer distributed by his followers in Philadelphia, charges his opponents with deceit, stealing, murder, lying, integration, fornication, adultery, alcohol, robbery, insurrection, dope, politics, rebellion and confusion.


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brought about by the teachings of Fard Muhammad and Elijah, had come to a successful end.

The Black Muslims, having been liberated from «slave mentality.» were ready, he argued, to accept true Islam, which alone, would help them overcome their feeling of racial superiority and identify with America. The main features of this Second Resurrection, he suggested, had to be defined by him through a reinterpretation, in a «higher language», of the Nation’s belief system. Wallace gave himself the title of Mujeddid, renewer of the faith, and declared that the time had come to renew Islam in America. (27)

His contention that Fard and Elijah had couched their ideas in symbolic language, which he alone could decipher, was used to legitimize his reforms, and allow him to introduce the concept of renewal in a belief system which had become frozen and hostile to change. The concept of tajdid or renewal of the faith enabled him to legitimize and introduce the much needed reforms which were to open, ideologically speaking, America to the members of the NOI, and incidentally deprive his opponents of their traditional power base.

Armed with these claims and concepts, Wallace D. Muhammad, whose power was derived mainly from the highly centralized bureaucratic structure of the NOI, started introducing the far-reaching reforms that were to transform the doctrine, ritual, symbols and organizational structure of the movement, redefine its goals and priorities, and give it a new image that was allow the Muslims to reap all the benefits of their improved economic status.

Wallace’s ax fell first on the belief system of the Nation: the profession of faith glorifying Fard Muhammad as Allah, and Elijah Muhammad as his Messenger, was replaced by the shahada or the orthodox Muslims’ profession of faith; next the Quran replaced the Bible and Elijah Muhammad’s teachings as the final authority in secular and spiritual matters (April 1975). The prescribed five daily prayers were stressed more than ever before, and the temples/mosques were cleared of their chairs and carpeted to allow the faithful to pray in the proper Muslim fashion. The month-long fast of Ramadan was first observed at its appointed time in the traditional Islamic calendar, and hajj (pilgrimage) groups flew to Mecca instead of Chicago.

(27) Mujeddid is derived from the Arabic verb jaddada, to renew. Wallace is using here a venerable reformist Muslim tradition based on the concept of ijtihad, which requires all Muslims to attempt to adapt Islam to its changing environment in order to prevent its liberating message from being stifled by the weight of traditions, without, however, endangering its spiritual integrity.
The secular aspects of the NOI’s belief system were also redefined before 1975 was over. Wallace taught that man was spirit rather than matter as Elijah had claimed. Spirit ruled over man’s flesh and man’s intellect, derived its nourishment and guidance from divine revelations, which instructed man how to live in order to overcome his physical environment.

Since man was more spirit than matter, one’s superiority could not rest on the color of one’s skin, but on moral excellence. The « original man, » he argued, was not necessarily a black man, but any « man whose mind was first enlightened. » Consequently the Muslim had to free himself from the « color slavery » and seek perfection and superiority in the spiritual realm through submission to the will of Allah. Muslims had to use their (superior) faith to lead their communities — regardless of the race or creed of their members — towards moral excellence: they had to stress man’s humanity, rather than race or color. To stress his commitment to moral excellence and his followers’ membership in the black race, Wallace urged the (black) Muslims in May, 1975 to refer to themselves as Bilalians Bilal Ibn Rabah, one of the first converts of Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century always put human brotherhood and his commitment to Islam, his new faith, above his blackness.

In July, 1975, Wallace suggested that Elijah Muhammad actually referred to the destruction of white supremacy and racism when he spoke of the annihilation of the white man. Islam wants to rid the world of racism, not white men. Muslims can, therefore, defeat racism, thanks to their superior knowledge of spiritual matters.

Wallace discontinued the NOI’s attacks on Christianity, but instead, launched a campaign against racism in religion. He declared racism a disease, and called on America to « remove all images and all racial effects from worship » to free both Bilalians and Caucasians from racism and artificiality.

In line with his campaign against racism, Wallace D. Muhammad suggested that « mental falsehood » and sinfulness, not the white man, had to be fought, but only with truth. It was the duty of all Muslims to combat racism in all its manifestations.

Wallace also stopped calling for a separate homeland for the blacks whom he urged to take an active part in their community and nation’s affairs and cooperate with all the legitimate, religious and secular.

(29) « Message of Concern to the American People », published since 1976 in all the issues of *Bilalian News*. 

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institutions in the country. To underscore the Muslims' commitment to America, he organized festivities to celebrate America's birthday which he called New World Patriotism Day in July, 1975. These festivities continue to be held in the major urban centers in America.

The Bilalian's celebration of America's new identity, Wallace said, in the second edition of New World Patriotism Day in 1976, would be observed in the "spirit of hope" only because America's "false independence... does not give enough to the Bilalians to allow them to celebrate America’s birthday in the spirit of thanksgiving." By July, 1979, however, Wallace D. Muhammad's commitment to America and its leadership was so total as to be unconditional. He argued that the high ideals of this country were being put into practice by Carter's moral leadership and that it was the duty of all Americans, including the Bilalians, to support America. Wallace urged all Bilalians to accept the shortcomings of man and his institutions and asked "how many non-blacks can depend on black rule in the United States for freedom, for justice, for equality, for equal opportunity, for equal protection under a black government?" He claimed he was merely carrying out Elijah's final wishes, and clearing the confusion between the Nation's condemnation of America and its leader's respect for her institutions.

The World Community of Al-Islam in the West

By January 1976, Wallace had effectively dismantled Elijah Muhammad's organization. For all practical purposes, it was no longer a nation: it had become only a Muslim organization, a Muslim community. Wallace had rejected the concept of nationhood based on religion and race, and emphasized the membership of the American Muslims in the world Muslim community. The motto of the new organization, the World Community of Al-Islam in the West, expressing its universalistic aims and its claims for moral excellence reads: "Bringing Humanity Together in Moral Excellence with Truth and Understanding."

The Nation of Islam, despite its nation-wide network of temples was

(32) Ibid., April 13, 1979, p. 18.
characterized by its stifling parochialism. It was designed to serve only a small segment of the ghetto population, and its appeal, before the advent of Malcolm X, was restricted to a small segment of Black America — Black Muslims pledged allegiance to their "native" i.e. local, leader and Savior. Its emphasis on material success further tied it down to its immediate environment, and to the present.

Malcolm X's involvement in the larger American and world community brought to the NOI a vision of the world which was too broad to fit in its parochial mold, and put a heavy strain on its organizational structure and belief system. He also brought into it the notion of a larger humanity, which transcended color and religious lines. Malcolm X was, however, unable to substitute his views for Elijah Muhammad's because of his timely expulsion from the movement. Elijah Muhammad was unwilling to adopt Malcolm's notion of unity, which was based on the concept of solidarity of all oppressed peoples, within and outside America.

The NOI was unable to transcend American racism: it accepted its value system completely, but used it to "liberate" the Blacks, who had suffered from it. Al-Hajj Malik Shabazz (Malcolm X after his pilgrimage to Mecca) tried to establish a new kind of organization where religion would play a minimal role. Malik Shabazz called for revolutionary solidarity instead of racial or religious solidarity.

Wallace, on the other hand, believed that unity should be based on the ideologically neutral concept of humanity and morality. His reorganization of the NOI, therefore, led his followers into the mainstream of American culture, at least as far as ideology was concerned. Indeed, it would be incorrect to suggest that he cut the gordian knot that ties the Muslims down to their ghetto environment. What he did was to recognize that the Muslims had to seek participation in America to achieve any lasting and respectable status. He sold off the local businesses of the NOI and urged his followers to stop being marginal Americans by seeking participation at different levels in American society.

Wallace's move served the needs of many of his followers by providing them with the ideological framework that legitimized their desire to be integrated into the larger society. Those Black Muslims who felt he had betrayed Elijah Muhammad and Fard Muhammad's teachings joined his opponents or flocked into the ranks of the Ansarullah Community whose belief system incorporates many of Elijah Muhammad's ideas. Wallace's

(33) The Ansarullah (Helpers of Allah) Community was founded in Brooklyn, New York, in 1970 by a Iman Abdullah Isa Ahmad Muhammad al-Mahdi, who claims to be the messiah the Jews, Christians and Muslims have been expecting for centuries. He also
reorganization of the NOI also repudiated the concept of leadership based on charisma and prophetic authority.

The Organization Structure of the WCIW

Changes in the organizational structure of the WCIW away from the personalistic control that characterized the NOI reflected the more universalistic world view of Wallace D. Muhammad as opposed to the particularistic views of his father.

In 1976 Wallace appointed a Council of Imams as the head of the WCIW. The Council of Imams (officials who had been known as ministers) is made up of six men who, in addition to their duties as regional Imams in charge of the coordination of the Community's activities in their region, are responsible for the following departments,

1. Zakat (Muslim income tax) and Islamic education
2. Relations with other communities and religious organizations
3. Prison matters
4. Business
5. Relations with Islamic communities
6. Relations with political and civic organizations.

The aims of the WCIW are to (a) propagate pure Quranic teachings, (b) propagate Islamic interests in the education of society, and (c) stress Islam's emphasis on the dignity of work and the worker.\(^{34}\)

Wallace also decreed that the mosque (later called a masjid, pl. masajid) was to devote itself exclusively to spiritual matters. The WCIW was to keep its most successful businesses and attempt to establish joint-venture businesses whenever possible. The proceeds from these businesses were to be used to help advance the cause of Islam, and subsidize the Community's schools and masajid.

The Fruit of Islam, the constabulary force whose real function was to

claims to be the great-grandson of the 19th century Sudanese Mahdi, come to preach true Islam, one that relies on the Hebrew, Christian and Muslim scriptures, and gather around him the 144,000 Nubians Allah has decided to save. The profession of faith of the Ansars reads: «There is no God but Allah, Muhammad is His Messenger, and Imam Mahdi is His (Khalifa) Representative on earth.» The Ansars are a very dynamic organization whose white-clad members are doing their best to capitalize on the death of Elijah Muhammad. Imam Mahdi claims that he is the spiritual heir of Elijah Muhammad.

reinforce discipline within the ranks of the Black Muslims, and serve as a private police force for Elijah Muhammad, was disbanded in 1975. The Muslims' new goals and maturity, Wallace declared, no longer required the services of such a force. Internal policing in the Community was to be based on a strict respect for the Quran; and the wrong-doers would be exposed before the congregation when crimes against Muslim morality were committed. Crimes against society, on the other hand, fell within the jurisdiction of the local police.

A procedure for handling complaints, which had been lacking in the NOI, was instituted. The local imam became responsible before the Regional Council of Imams and his own congregation, for any breach of trust or misconduct. To clear his name, he was required to answer charges against him and in the event of his censure was to resign or be fired. The supreme law, in spiritual and moral matters, was the Quran and the *hadith*; the authority, however, was in the hands of the congregation. Wallace said in this context: «The authority is the people. God gave us democracy, and authority is in the people, not one of them, but the majority — the majority consensus.»

Wallace's reorganization of the NOI effectively destroyed the old networks of influence and power within the movement and allowed him to monopolize both spiritual and economic power within the WCIW. Indeed, he controlled the businesses of the WCIW while the local imams were deprived of their local economic base. His use of the Quran, and his call for integration effectively neutralized the NOI's parochial ideology, and made him look like a true leader with a program of his own.

Wallace's objectives could not have been reached so easily had the membership and the constituency of the NOI not changed considerably in the past fifteen years of the movement. The Black Muslims had become, in Michael Parenti's words, «psychological as well as material 'haves'» and a substantial number of them had achieved a degree of material well being, which required only a matching degree of social acceptance and respectability to turn them from outsiders into respected members of society. The NOI's «middle classes» were ready to trade their ideology for the good life which comes with a steady income and social acceptance.

The Involvement of the WCIW in American Society

Wallace called for cooperation between the races, preached a message of

social coexistence, and suggested that the experience of the WCIW in the area of social rehabilitation of drug addicts, alcoholics, prostitutes and prisoners could be used to benefit all Americans. The Muslims’ easy access to prisons and hospitals facilitated their efforts to spread Islam among these inmates and legitimized Wallace’s claim to leadership in the Black community.

The WCIW is actively involved in the rehabilitation of prisoners, both inside and outside correctional institutions around the country. The Community’s Prison Services Bureau receives adequate support from the prison authorities around the country in its efforts to organize masajid within the prisons. In fact some prisons have not only allowed the Muslims to organize, but have hired Muslim «chaplains» to lead the Friday congregational prayers, and preach to the inmates.\(^{37}\) Prison authorities have generally welcomed the Muslims’ efforts to organize the prisoners in masajid because they preach respect for authority, the laws of the land, and good, decent behavior. Muslim prisoners have tended to avoid disruptive behavior within the prisons, and this has not gone unnoticed among the prison authorities.

The WCIW is still committed to the rehabilitation of the most deprived members of the ghetto, for both pragmatic and idealistic reasons, but it is highly unlikely that its leadership will again offer the opportunity for a Malcolm X to achieve a position of national prominence equal to that of Malik Shabazz. The leadership of the organization is reserved, so to speak, to the educated and the well-to-do among the Muslims.

The WCIW is actively trying to spread its activities to all levels of American life, including the universities and the armed forces. There are to-date, seven masajid on U.S. bases: and the WCIW is well represented among the minority businesses in America.

Wallace’s efforts to make his organization acceptable to America have been concentrated on achieving recognition at the local level first. Local government institutions were courted through various shows of support, clean up campaigns, crime-watch patrols and other means. In March, 1977, Wallace even suggested leading five hundred of his followers to Washington, D.C. to free some one hundred and fifty American hostages who were held by a rival Hanafi Muslim, Hamaas Abdul-Khaalis.\(^{38}\)

\(^{37}\) I have not been able to get any information about the WCIW’s involvement in prison matters, but my survey of Bilalian News shows that the Muslims are deeply involved in the efforts to organize Muslim prisoners within the nation’s correctional centers.

He also courted the religious establishment in the country by sponsoring inter-faith conferences, and through his support of church activities.

**The Impact of Wallace D. Muhammad's Reforms on the WCIW**

Having made plain his commitment to America and to orthodox Islam, and having brushed aside the stigma of racism, fanaticism and heresy which tarnished the movement's image, Wallace forged ahead in an attempt to reap all the political and economic benefits he could get for his followers.

The Muslim World leaders, who had cautiously supported Elijah Muhammad, increased their support to the WCIW. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) provided most of the funds for the erection of a $16 million complex the WCIW intended to build in Chicago. This project, which was unveiled in early 1977, has not yet been completed.(39)

The Muslim World League, on the other hand, sponsored programs to train imams for the WCIW’s masajid around the country, beginning in 1977, and in 1979 the Gulf States promised funds for the erection of the Islamic Teacher Training College. The Muslim world also provided other forms of support, in the form of scholarships, support to existing WCIW institutions, loan of imamas and teachers, gifts of textbooks and religious literature, invitations to attend Muslim-sponsored conferences, such as the Tenth Islamic Conference which was held in Fes, Morocco, in May 1979, and other forms of support.

On the American front, the WCIW saw its relationship with the national and local governments improve dramatically. Local government authorities around the country, and particularly in Chicago, Newark, Atlanta, Philadelphia, New York and Washington, D.C., relaxed their efforts to contain the Muslims' attempts to expand their facilities in their areas. The city of Chicago helped the WCIW secure the land it needed to build its religious and commercial center, and declared it a major contribution to urban renewal efforts in the city. Cooperation also increased between the prison authorities, the army and the WCIW, but it is in the economic field that the fruits of cooperation have been greatest. Indeed, the U.S. government placed the largest order it ever placed with minority businesses with the American Pouch Foods company, a joint venture involving the WCIW and a Chinese-American partner, to produce 28 million pouches a year for the Department of Defense, at a total cost of $22 million.

Wallace claims that America has come a long way from the racism which characterized her attitude towards minorities in general, and towards the

blacks in particular. To him, the greatest argument in favor of his assessment of the racial situation in this country is America’s Willingness to trust the WCIW, the heir of the Nation of Islam, with the preparation of food rations for her armed forces. He contends that America has truly become a new nation whose maturity allows her to treat all her citizens fairly, and encourage those who have faith in her. He also believes that his call for coexistence between the races has brought him and his followers a rich harvest of political and economic as well as social gains.

The most dramatic increase in the WCIW’s participation in American life remains, however, limited to the religious field. In January, 1976, the WCIW had 85 mosques in America and the Caribbean, whereas the August 3, 1979 issue of Bilalian News lists a total of 164 masajid. This figure does not represent the total number of places of worship because it neither includes the army and prison masajid, nor branches of the local masjid. There are four masajid in Philadelphia, for example, while the paper only lists one.

The impact of Wallace’s leadership on the Muslims’ identity and world view is clear. He has successfully managed to replace Elijah Muhammad’s concepts of God, world, leadership and self-identity with his own, in his followers’ minds. His success in this area was greatly facilitated by his monopolization of both economic and spiritual power within the NOI, as well as the changing nature of the NOI’s constituency and the increasing pressure for change from American society.

The Muslims’ World View

Wallace’s followers no longer see the world simply as a hostile environment, nor do they consider all Americans as their implacable enemies; they recognize that many injustices still exist in America, but they feel that enough goodwill and understanding exists to help them to succeed in the world. Besides, they also see themselves as members of a fairly powerful community capable of defending them against unfair pressures from the larger society.

The Muslims have forsaken Elijah Muhammad’s notion of God and salvation and charge that it is a Christian notion which encourages materialism. Allah, they believe, is a compassionate, omnipotent and merciful spiritual force whose promise of salvation is made to all men regardless of color. Salvation is spiritual salvation, whereas man’s material success is merely a sign of God’s blessings.

Their concept of divinity and mankind, they feel, is much broader than it has ever been when they were Black Muslims. Humanity now includes all
men regardless of their race, and the dignity of all men should be upheld.

When pressed to elaborate on the concept of human brotherhood, a Muslim university student declared that race and religion were irrelevant as far as man's humanity is concerned. He pointed out that he could not exclude men on the basis of race because man's most important feature is his « spirit ». As for religion, he added, there is always hope that man would answer Allah's call, besides, he added, « can we blame anybody for his unawareness of Islam ? » The Muslim's responsibility to mankind, he said, is enormous; he has to spread Islam, and promote morality and good citizenship. Humanity, he said, cannot be divided by appeals to solidarity on political or religious grounds. The stress, it seems, is on the neutral concept of humanity, a concept which appeals particularly to less radical individuals who are reluctant to « rock the boat. »

Muslims consider their life-style and Islam to be superior to those of the larger community in which they live because, they claim, both come closer to the natural order which requires the spirit to rule the flesh and calls for a well structured society which stresses man's responsibility towards his family, and the leaders' commitment to their constituencies.

Adherence to the superior Islamic teachings, another Muslim noted, has enabled the Bilalians to build stable families and a strong and moral community whose contributions to society are enormous. Men, she added, have eluded their responsibility towards their families because they had failed to answer Allah's call for order. Now, however, men are sharing in the duty of building strong families, and raising healthy children.

Asked whether American society prevents them from fulfilling their religious duties, my respondents have been careful to stress the ability of Islam to adapt to its environment, and American society's growing cooperation with the Muslims. This cooperation, they argued, was brought about by the Muslims' morality and good citizenship.

Conclusion

The Nation of Islam's organizational structure and belief system represented one way through which blacks were able to overcome many of the problems facing them in the ghetto. In constructing a belief system, Elijah Muhammed relied heavily on black perceptions of and reactions to white society's models. Just as white America's notion of humanity was built on the principle of white supremacy, Elijah's notion of humanity was restricted to the black race. He fostered a belief in black supremacy and segregation derived from reactions to white racism as well as from the black nationalist tradition. Likewise, the white « Puritan ethic » found a counter-
part in Elijah’s stress on hard work, thrift, and morality as the key to black salvation.

Appearances to the contrary, the Black Muslim worldview was neither radical nor utopian. It was rather a pragmatic and essentially conservative response to conditions of ghetto life as Elijah’s stress on separate development, entrepreneurship, and economic success would indicate. The charges of some critics notwithstanding, the Black Muslims were not pathological cases living in a dreamworld. The only utopian aspect of their belief system was concerned with their imminent victory over white America — but as we have seen, its symbolic efficacy helped them cope with segregation and racism.

The belief system of the Nation of Islam helped blacks achieve spiritual, psychological, and ideological independence from white America, so much so that when Wallace D. Muhammad succeeded his father as the head of the NOI, his most difficult task was to break the psychological barrier that isolated the Black Muslims from the larger society.

Elijah Muhammad had uncritically accepted the values of American society; he believed that the survival of his people could be achieved only through divine intervention, dogged resistance, and separate growth. Wallace’s conversion to orthodox Islam, on the other hand, signalled the beginning of the demise of such a narrow, parochial world view by demonstrating its inadequacy in the mid-1970’s. By stressing the integration of the Bilalian in the larger American society and the world Muslim community, Wallace gave the (black) Muslim a means of overcoming his minority status in America and allowed him to assert his blackness in ways acceptable to the larger society. The broadening of the Muslims’ worldview was itself a move away from the grim ghetto environment and a testimony to the fact that for most (black) Muslims, economic and social conditions had improved to the point that separatism and withdrawal from white society were no longer attractive alternatives.

(April 1981)