

## The Nation of Islam

**By Ron Carter**

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**Founder:** Wallace Dodd Fard. Also known as “Master Fard Muhammad.”

**Founding Date:** July 4, 1930.

**Official Publications:** *Message To The Black Man In America, The Supreme Wisdom, Our Savior Has Arrived, The Final Call Magazine.*

**Key leaders:** Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, Louis Farrakhan.

### History

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The Nation of Islam was founded during the Great Depression of 1930 in the ghettos of Detroit Michigan. Having migrated to the industrial north in search of economic opportunity and to escape the racial oppression in the South, thousands of Blacks now found themselves in a crisis situation. As it turned out “the North was no Promised Land [but, in many ways,] was the South all over again...”<sup>1</sup> The main difference being the racial prejudice in the South was overt whereas in the North it was covert.

The starving, overcrowded blacks living in the slums of Detroit (as in other Northern cities) became increasingly bitter towards the whites who seemed to control their lives. Police officers, who are the ever present reminder of white power; white workers, who displaced blacks as jobs became more scarce or who retained their jobs as thousands of blacks were being laid off; even the welfare workers, who insulted the blacks and made them wait long hours before passing out the pitiful supplies of flour and lard — all these became the symbolic targets of a virulent hatred of whites...<sup>2</sup>

Unable to resurrect the institutions and social systems that provided them security and support (i.e. mutual aid societies) in the South, blacks in the North cried out for deliverance. As Colin Akridge wrote, “Instead of looking for a spiritual Savior who would save them from their sins, they wanted a carnal savior who would save them from their poverty. They wanted their ‘pie’ now and were no longer interested in the Gospel.”<sup>3</sup>

These desires were met in the summer of 1930 when a mysterious peddler of silks and artifacts by the name Wallace Fard Muhammad appeared in Detroit. Very little is known about him except that he is reported to have come from the East. “His mission was to teach freedom, justice, and equality to the members of the ‘lost tribe of Shabazz in the wilderness of North America.’”<sup>4</sup> He also taught poor blacks that “they were somebody. That they were *Black people*.... [who had] a past...[and] a future.... a history and a destiny.”<sup>5</sup>

Because of the social climate and his teachings, Fard quickly gained a following. Within about three years he had recruited nearly 8,000 followers. One of these was an unemployed auto worker named Elijah Poole. Poole, who later changed his last name to Muhammad, was born the son of a Baptist minister in Sandersville, Georgia. He

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eventually migrated to Detroit with his wife, Clara, and their two children, and became a devoted follower of Fard. Due to his efforts on Fard's behalf Fard soon chose him to be his Chief Minister.

In the summer of 1934, Fard suddenly disappeared as mysteriously as he had arrived. Elijah Muhammad was named the new leader and assumed the title of "Messenger of Allah."

Perhaps the single most important event in the development of the Nation of Islam took place in 1947 with the "conversion" of a convict in prison at Concord, Massachusetts. His name was Malcolm Little but he would become best known by the name he later took, Malcolm X.

Like Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm was the son of a Baptist minister. He was born in Omaha, Nebraska, but spent his formative years in Lansing, Michigan, where life proved to be a struggle for Malcolm and his family. At age six, their home was burned to the ground by the Ku Klux Klan, and a short time later his father was found dead under a streetcar.

Though his mother tried to keep the family together, they were eventually separated with Malcolm being sent to a boy's institution. While in the eighth grade he was asked what vocation he wanted to pursue. When he responded that he wanted to be a lawyer, he was informed that such a profession was not suitable for a Negro.<sup>6</sup> This ugly retort proved to be psychologically devastating. Malcolm would eventually leave the school and rather than pursuing the law, he would embark upon a life of delinquency and crime that would send him to prison for 10 years.

The turning point came in 1948 when his brothers, Philbert and Reginald, introduced him to the teachings of Elijah Muhammad and he converted to the Nation of Islam. "Upon his release from prison in the spring of 1952, Malcolm went to Detroit, Michigan, where he became Malcolm X, a minister of Temple No. 1. From then until 1964 Malcolm X was the main exponent of Elijah Muhammad's doctrine."<sup>7</sup>

After years of dedicated service to Elijah Muhammad, a rift developed between the two. Malcolm's worst suspicions were confirmed when a news report disclosed that two of Elijah Muhammad's former secretaries had filed paternity suits against him charging that he had fathered their four children. Devastated, Malcolm left the Nation of Islam and formed two organizations, The Muslim Mosque, Inc., and the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU).

Malcolm moved more toward orthodox Islam, traveling extensively in Africa and the Middle East and participating in the Islamic holy pilgrimage to Mecca. After returning to the United States he was assassinated — gunned down at the Audoban Ballroom in Harlem, New York, on February 21, 1965.

With the death of Elijah Muhammad of congestive heart failure on February 25, 1975, his son, Wallace Deen Muhammad became the new leader of the Nation of Islam.<sup>8</sup> Because of his knowledge of orthodox Islam, Wallace immediately began to make changes. Perhaps the most dramatic, some ten years later, was when he merged his followers into traditional, international Islam. This merging

'had been his goal for the mission from "day one." I have been trying to bring what used to be called the Nation of Islam to what I call a natural and normal Islamic community,' he said. 'The idea we have had of a community is not Islamic and came from the days of black nationalism. Our religion does not require the degree of organization and centralized control we have been used to. ... Muslims are just Muslims, and they go to the mosque, and that is it.'<sup>9</sup>

Another significant change was the group's commitment to racial harmony. "The

same blacks who once believed whites were devils and who advocated the overthrow of the government now profess racial harmony, brotherly love and American patriotism.”<sup>10</sup>

Not all of Elijah Muhammad’s former followers were pleased with this new direction; many did not agree with the reforms made by Wallace. “One of the most hurting blows came when a disenchanted faction split from the fold. That faction, which adheres to the original tenets, is led by Louis Farrakhan...”<sup>11</sup> Farrakhan essentially reorganized the old Nation of Islam.

Born Louis Eugene Walcott on May 11, 1933, in the Bronx, New York, Farrakhan was a recruit of Malcolm X whom he had met in 1955. Shortly thereafter he became a member of the Nation of Islam and quickly progressed through the ranks. He served under Malcolm for nine months and became the minister of the mosque in Boston, where he had spent his formative years. After the death of Malcolm X, this highly educated young man who had been raised a devout Episcopalian, graduated from Boston Latin School with honors and who had spent two years at Winston-Salem Teachers College in North Carolina,<sup>12</sup> became Elijah Muhammad’s National Spokesman.

Although Farrakhan’s organization claims to be the authentic Nation of Islam, there are three other organizations making this same claim. John Muhammad, Elijah Muhammad’s blood brother, heads one, based in Detroit. A second organization is based in Atlanta and headed by Silas Muhammad. Emanuel Abdulla Muhammad established a third organization in Baltimore. The most recognized of the four organizations is that founded by Louis Farrakhan.

## **DOCTRINE**

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### **I. God:**

#### A. God is not Spirit, but a man.

God is a man and we just cannot make Him other than man, least we make Him an inferior one... A spirit is subjected to us and not we to the spirit. .... Allah came to us from the Holy City of Mecca, Arabia, in 1930. He used the name Wallace D. Fard, often signing it W. D. Fard.... He came alone.<sup>13</sup>

#### B. God is not eternal (He lives and dies).

Well, we all know that there was a God in the beginning that created all these things and do know that He does not exist today. But we know again that from that God the person of God continued until today in His people, and today a Supreme One (God) has appeared among us with the same infinite wisdom to bring about a complete change.<sup>14</sup>

There is no God Living Who was here in the Creation of the Universe, but They produce Gods from Them and Their Wisdom lives in us.<sup>15</sup>

#### C. God is one of many gods (Polytheism).

The Black Man’s Gods, according to the history He [Allah] taught me, have All been the Wisest.<sup>16</sup>

Six thousand years ago, or to be more exact 6,600 years ago, as Allah taught me, our nation gave birth to another God whose name was Yacub.<sup>17</sup>

### **II. Jesus Christ:**

#### A. Christ was only a mortal man and a prophet, not God.

He [Jesus] was nothing more than a prophet... Making the Son and the Holy Ghost the equal with the Father is absolutely sinful.<sup>18</sup>

B. He did not rise from the dead.

He [Jesus] was nothing more than a prophet, and he has gone back to the earth, never to return alive. We know what happened to him 2,000 years ago. He cannot come back from the grave. He is not in heaven.<sup>19</sup>

### III. The Bible:

A. It is incomplete.

The Bible is not all holy, nor is it all the Word of God!<sup>20</sup>

B. It is a poisonous book.

The Bible is now being called the Poison Book by God Himself, and who can deny that it is not poison? It has poisoned the very hearts and minds of the so-called Negroes so much that they can't agree with each other...The Bible is the graveyard of my poor people (the so-called Negroes)... The Bible charges all of its Great Prophets with evil, it makes God guilty of an act of an act of adultery by charging Him with being the father of Mary's baby (Jesus), again it charges Noah and Lot with drunkenness, and Lot with getting children by his daughter. What a Poison Book.<sup>21</sup>

## BIBLICAL RESPONSE

1. God the Father is a Spirit Being. Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God (John 4:23; Matthew 1:22).
2. God is eternal. He has no beginning and no ending (Psalms 90:2; 102:26; Isaiah 43:10-11; 48:12; Revelation 1:8).
3. There is only one God (Deuteronomy 6:3; Isaiah 43:10-11; 44:6-8; 45:5-6, 14, 21).
4. Jesus has been raised from the dead and is seated at the right hand of God (1 Corinthians 15:1-6; Ephesians 1:20; 2:6).
5. The Word of God is pure, perfect, sure, and inspired (Psalms 19:7-8; 111:7-8; 2 Peter 1:21).

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Lincoln, Eric C., *The Black Muslims in America*, (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, Inc., 1994) 13.  
<sup>2</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>3</sup> Akridge, Colin P., *Why I Cannot Be A Black Muslim*, (Newport, PA: Research and Education Foundation, 1995) 2.  
<sup>4</sup> *Gnosis Magazine*, 59.  
<sup>5</sup> Lincoln, *The Black Church Since Frazier*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1989) 163.  
<sup>6</sup> Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 189.  
<sup>7</sup> Ellis, Carl F. Jr., *Free At Last?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996) 100.  
<sup>8</sup> Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 263.  
<sup>9</sup> *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, May 4, 1985, 3C.  
<sup>10</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 28, 1985.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>12</sup> Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 268.  
<sup>13</sup> Muhammad, Elijah, *Message to the Blackman in America*, (Chicago: The Final Call, Inc., 1965) 6, 16.  
<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 9.  
<sup>15</sup> Muhammad, Elijah, *Our Savior Has Arrived*, (Newport News, VA: United Brothers Communications Systems, n.d.) 97.  
<sup>16</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>17</sup> Muhammad, *Message*, 10.  
<sup>18</sup> Muhammad, *Our Savior*, 195, 152.  
<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 195, 210.  
<sup>20</sup> Muhammad, *Message*, 89.  
<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 94, 95.



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