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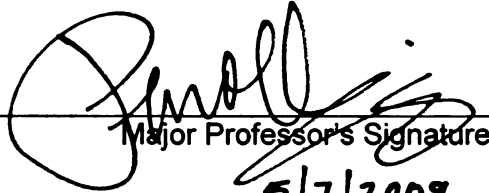
**"A NATION CAN RISE NO HIGHER THAN ITS WOMEN:"
THE CRITICAL ROLE OF BLACK MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE
DEVELOPMENT AND PURVEYANCE OF BLACK
CONSCIOUSNESS, 1945 to 1975**

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ABSTRACT

“A NATION CAN RISE NO HIGHER THAN ITS WOMEN” THE CRITICAL ROLE OF BLACK MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND PURVEYANCE OF BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS, 1945 - 1975

By

Bayyinah Sharief Jeffries

During the era of Black consciousness from 1945 to 1975, the Nation of Islam was a major sociopolitical, economic, and educational force in Black communities throughout the United States. It was this period, Black Muslim women worked hard to actualize the Nation of Islam’s self-help initiatives that would result in independent institutions “by,” “for” and “about” Black people. Ironically, although these women were a part of one of the most unique and far-reaching communities throughout the era of Black consciousness, scholars of various disciplines have consistently marginalized and overlooked the critical achievements and activism of these women from the historiography. Though Nation women demonstrated considerable agency and made tremendous contributions to the positive development of the Black community, particularly in family, gender relations, community life, business and educational institutions, and even the independent Black school movement of the 1970s, they have not been acknowledged as important within the American historical annals. Consequently, this dissertation is descriptive and in many ways corrective as it explores Nation women as purveyors of Black consciousness post-World War II.

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DEDICATION

To my parents: for your examples of stalwart determination, beautiful courage and stead-fast righteousness. You both have been my guide and salvation as I have navigated through the muddy waters of this world, of which you have prepared me well.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

“Ima Talken Bout the Nation of Islam”	1
Lost-Found Nation of Islam in the Wilderness of North America	3
Historical Framework	7
Contextualizing the Rise of the Nation.....	11
Overview of Chapters	29

Chapter 1

Methodology, Theoretical Framework and Brief Discussion of Sources	41
Location of Researcher	58

Chapter 2

“To Gain A Place in the Sun:” A Historiography of the Original Nation of Islam	70
Scholarship on the Nation of Islam, 1930-1975	75
The Nation of Islam, 1975 to mid-1980’s	87
The Nation of Islam, 1990s -2000s.....	91
Nation of Islam Women	101
Making Space: Nation of Islam Women in the American Historiography	114

Chapter 3

“A Voice from the East:” Women, Islam and Gender	123
The Appeal for Women	125
The Religious Factor	132
The Political Factor	139
The Message Factor	148
Protection, Security & Male Factor	150
The “X” Factor	163
Gender Roles.....	168
Community Expansion	175
Roll Call: Prominent Women in the Nation of Islam	178

Chapter 4	
“We Must Teach Our Own:” Muslim Women as Primary and Pioneering Agents of Black Consciousness	195
“Upon the Education of Its People Rests the Fate Of A Nation:” The early years of the Nation’s Education Program, 1930-1945.....	200
The Nation Schools Post World War II	208
Education: From the Cradle to the Grave	212
Membership/Orientation	213
Muhammad’s University of Islam.....	218
Extended Education: Muslim Girls in Training & General Civilization Class (MGT & GCC)	226
The Other “Sisters in the Struggle:” Nation Women within the Continuum of Black Women Activists	235
Chapter 5	
“Raising Her Voice:” The Contributions of Women in <i>Muhammad Speaks Newspaper, 1961-1975</i>	251
Origins and Background of the Nation of Islam Newspapers	253
The Historical Context: Duty-Bound to Raise Their Voices	258
Health	258
Reproductive Rights	259
Education	260
Black World Affairs.....	260
Contributions “By,” “For,” and “About” Women	261
“Love the Skin You’re In,” Black Women and Issues of Identity	263
“But Some of Us Are Brave” Black Women on Education	268
Women Concerning Health and Home	273
“On Common Ground” Nation Women, Global Discourse and Islam as a Vehicle for Black Liberation	278
Conclusion	293
Appendices	
Lexicon	303
Nation Women	305

Bibliography	312
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Ima Talken About the Nation of Islam

ima talken bout THE NATION OF ISLAM
this poem is about a Messenger about his blk/truth

thumpen like drums
against the skins of blk/people
till they shred their sculptured despair

this poem is about love
pouren from his Body like honey
sweetenen our peppermint lives

about black stars
propellen themselves into the abandonment
of a radarless universe

ima talken bout his touch
it be soft as the laughter of rain
about his voice
it be like the wind
pushen us to be what we wuz
Original man. pushen us into the
suddenness of our ancient beginnings.

Ima talken about mountains of blk/velvet
cushioned us as we circle
the skulls of devils

about food growen
about cattle moven in the dust of change
and always His voice

maken harmony with our twilight thoughts
to do for self, do for self,
do for self BLACK MAN

ima talken about Muslim men and women on the move
like a fire travellen down a fuse
bout Minister Robert's Pittsburgh mosque
bout brother Leon and sister Gladys returnen us to our herbal past
the pioneer sounds of Minister Donald's mosque

about sister captain Clotelle directen
the hunger of black women

till they become magical women
with the secret of lightenen inside them.

ima talken about Minister Farrakhan
singen his songs of black unity
about a Blk/nation already here
ripenen our minds
till our bodies glow like a thousand red rubies

ima talken about a nation
ima talken about a black muslim
insurrection, (don't you hearrRRRR it?)

ima talken about a nation
ima talken about Jihad like
the world ain't never seen.
(can you seeeEEE it?)

the poem is talken about a Black man.
an Apostle who came. God like.
thru the bowels of our blues
and turned the faces of
nodden, drinken, killen men
from weekend arenas of death,
EAST WARD

ima talken about the Nation of Islam
the Honorable Elijah Muhammad
about his season of truth
standen like a city of red hills
in whose name
i bring you this poem
in whose name
i give you this prayer
al-Hamdulillah

-- sonia sanchez¹

INTRODUCTION

The Lost-Found Nation of Islam in the Wilderness of North America

I want an education for my people that will let them exercise the right of freedom. We are constantly told that we are free. Why can't we take advantage of that freedom? I want an education for my people that will elevate them. Messenger Muhammad constantly teaches us that we should take advantage of the freedom we have had for over a century now, but instead of the black man using his freedom to improve himself he uses it to make a fool of himself. We will never elevate ourselves until we start practicing self-improvement daily and follow the Messenger's teachings. Self-improvement also means to do for self as an individual and as a nation.²

--Hallema Muhammad, Assistant Dean
Muhammad University of Islam

This dissertation concerns Black women in the largest Muslim community in the United States of America, the Nation of Islam (NOI), from 1945 to 1975. Historically a racist society, the United States has a legacy of gruesome racial violence against people of African descent. Given this bequest of sadism and injustice, it is no surprise that religion, like race, and much later sexuality, played a pivotal role in sociopolitical conflicts between Blacks and whites in the mid 20th century. Similarly, the events that occurred from the late 1940s until the mid 1970s, race and religious based, have inspired the production of significant scholarship on the Nation of Islam in general and so-called orthodox Islam in particular. Nonetheless, a comprehensive book that critically investigates Nation of Islam women does not exist. This is curious given the current renaissance of Islamic Studies in the United States, particularly concerning issues of gender. The revival of Islamic inquiry juxtaposed with the clear exclusion of scholarly literature concerning Nation women, who constituted the great majority of Muslims in the

United States during the second half of the twentieth century, seems to be more than a mere oversight.³ It is perhaps a longstanding notion that Islam and those who follow it are enemies of so-called American democratic values and individual freedoms.⁴ Since the September 11, 2001, attacks, there has been a growing concern about the presence of Muslims in the United States and abroad. This has led to several scholarly works on the 'state' of Muslims in the United States, and assertions, no doubt with great alarm, that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the United States, and "within a matter of decades . . . [it will be] the second largest religion in America" well surpassing Judaism.⁵ In 2002, historian Robert Dannin proposed that "almost 90 percent of the converts to Islam in the United States [were] African Americans."⁶ Although it is almost impossible to estimate the actual number of Muslims, particularly Black Muslims in the United States today, it is even more difficult to discern just how many are actually women. Still, the implications of Dannin's estimates are extremely fascinating as we consider the intersection of race and religion in light of the historical treatment of Muslims in the U.S. even prior to 9-11.⁷ The fact that Black people could represent the most significant drivers of the fastest growing religion in the United States can only be attributed to the power, influence, and legacy of the Nation of Islam, which according to some scholars "was the most important Pan-Africanist organization in America [at least since] . . . the 1930s."⁸

The aftermath of 9-11 yielded an increased distortion of the American worldview of Islam. These views were predictably negative and fit so comfortably into long-standing assumptions about the oppression of Muslim women.⁹ It is

important, given the rapid growth of Islam, among African Americans, to engage these claims, both as they can, will, and do contribute to an already blighted perception, internal and external, of African Americans in the United States. Even more powerfully, it creates an opportunity to unearth the voices of Black women who paved the way and helped to develop an Islamic community that was significant as an antecedent to the modern Civil Rights and Black Power movements notably vital force during the Cold War period, or what historian Manning Marable has now coined the “Second Reconstruction.”¹⁰ “A Nation Can Rise No Higher than its Women:’ The Critical Role of Black Muslim Women in the Development and Purveyance of Black Consciousness, 1945-1975” is valuable not only because it reflects a far more accurate picture of the practice of Islam in the United States but also reclaims, illuminates, and more precisely clarifies the image and role of Muslim women within the Islamic community from 1945 until 1975.

I contend that Nation of Islam women, during the post-World War II era of Black consciousness, were the developers and purveyors of Black consciousness in all of its manifestations. As such, Black women were integral to the Nation of Islam’s early stability and growth, contributing to its economic, educational, cultural, and political development.¹¹ As self-determinists and deliberate community builders, Nation of Islam women desired and created a separate existence outside of white normative models of womanhood. Within the Nation of Islam they held comparable positions to men, designed their own attire, embraced and championed African-centered ideas of beauty, trained in the arts

of self-defense, and reclaimed their own and their children's education, an additionally, they developed and led programs to dismantle the psychological chains of Black oppression, as well as shaping and participating in the international dialogue of critical Black consciousness. Given their crucial role in the Nation of Islam, and the overall struggle for Black liberation, Nation women must be afforded their proper place within the African American historical experience from which they have been excluded. This dissertation offers a detailed and critical discussion about Black women's experiences within the Nation and how those encounters came to impact the Nation and its pivotal role in the development and ascendancy of Black consciousness to its apex in the mid 1970s.

It is undeniable that women of the Nation of Islam not only complicate but at times contradict protracted and disparaging views about Muslim women. Under the cloak of the Nation of Islam, Black women were able, confident, disciplined, outspoken, essential, and respected contributors to community life. Contrary to commonly held views, the gender relations within the Nation were comparatively utopian for women, particularly when juxtaposed with life for women outside the Nation's community.¹² To be sure, Black Muslim women negotiated and used powerful "gender capital," a subject explored extensively in later chapters.

In the remainder of this introduction, I provide a brief summary of the historical framework under which I critically assemble the experiences of Nation women, providing a chronologically structured general history of the Nation of

Islam during this period. In doing so I also highlight the distinctions between what is considered the “original,” and the “reconstituted” Nation of Islam in order to establish a foundation upon which to enter a more detailed discussion about the contributions of Nation women. It is necessary to differentiate between the current manifestations of the major Black Islamic communities born from the Nation in order to properly contextualize the original Nation women, as opposed to their contemporary counterparts in the reconstituted Nation under Minister Louis Farrakhan. Finally, I provide an outline of the chapters of this dissertation and of the major research questions each chapter addresses.

Historical Framework

The first step . . . is to make the black man come to himself; to pump back life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity, to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme . . . This is what we mean by an inward-looking process. This is the definition of "Black Consciousness".¹³

Through more than sixty years, the Nation of Islam in its various forms has become the longest lasting and most enduring of the black militant and separatist movements that have appeared in the history of black people in the United States. Besides its crucial role in the development of the black-consciousness movement, the Nation is important for having introduced Islam as a fourth major religious tradition in American society.¹⁴

This dissertation is not necessarily a women’s history, although the experiences of women are central to the narrative. Instead, this is a community history where women play leading roles in its unfolding. The traditionally limited views presented on the Nation of Islam have made it necessary for the researcher to bring balance to the historiography by offering a counter, gendered, and at times revisionist work centering on women. Written as an Africana

womanist historical account, this work is generally about former Nation of Islam women, from 1945 to 1975, during what may be considered the era of Black consciousness.¹⁵

In 1954, Rayford W. Logan offered what he described as the “nadir” of the Black experience in America that encompassed “the last decade of the nineteenth century and the opening of the twentieth century.” Logan defined the nadir as the lowest point in Black American history typified by “the continued decline in the recognition of [Black people’s] political and legal rights.”¹⁶ Manning Marable added that, “the watershed of Afro-American history occurred during the 1940s when the fierce battles to throw off Jim Crow and the Black Codes began to coalesce and foment.”¹⁷ Further, Marable contends, it was this beginning of the “Second Reconstruction” that continued the legal and political legacy that initially, though briefly, followed emancipation.¹⁸ While I borrow from Logan’s theory concerning the nadir and Marable’s subsequent reframing of the period that followed, I suggest another possible framework through which to view the period of Black history from 1945 to 1975. This epoch may be envisaged as an era of Black consciousness with an “apex” or highest point from 1965 to 1975. The era, characterized and shaped by the transcendent historical and nearly simultaneous happenings of this period, was the sum of which contributed to a bolstering and proliferation of a strong global Black identity and community; an era and process to which the Nation of Islam contributed significantly.

Before the United States Black Power movement from about 1966 until 1975, Kwame Nkrumah’s African Nationalism and the South African Black

Consciousness movement of the mid-1960s, the Nation of Islam had perhaps laid the groundwork for the global Black consciousness movement beginning as early as the 1930s.¹⁹ It goes without saying that Marcus Garvey an important intellectual pioneer of Black consciousness and the NOI carried those ideas forward. Indeed, it is not surprising that the era of Black consciousness tracks so closely with the rise of the Nation as its growth spanned and spurred the epoch during which Black people from around the world seriously began to examine how their fates were inextricably tied to one another.²⁰ It is during the course of this very historical period that people of African descent throughout the Diaspora broke from those psychological and economic trappings that caused them to remain religiously, economically, politically, and educationally enslaved as white European-American chattel slavery and during colonialism. I contend that during this period, the trek upon this path was led significantly by the Nation—Black Muslims of the Nation of Islam, specifically women, began their community from the outset focused single-mindedly on securing Black liberation and self-determination by any and all means.²¹

The era of Black consciousness, 1945-1975, as a historical framework comprises one of the most critical periods not only in the United States, but also in world history as it marks the “emergence of the world’s nonwhite majority from white colonial rule into national independence,” particularly for those of African descent.²² This is extremely vital in helping to understand the Nation of Islam as part of this international movement toward sociopolitical and economic autonomy. The rise of Black consciousness was conceivably sparked by several

factors including, among other things, the start of the Cold war, which propagated anti-Black sentiments in concert with anti-communist rhetoric.²³ The Cold war essentially amplified the necessity for nonwhite alliances even broader than they had been in the past, especially for Black American advocates of Islam who became partly associated by proxy with an estimated “60 million Muslims” worldwide.²⁴ The after effects of World War II proved pivotal to the era of Black consciousness but also the apex as Blacks throughout the world were disillusioned with talk of freedom and democracy, both of which remained beyond their reach.²⁵ The events that almost certainly help spark, reframe, and define the apex involve the United States modern civil rights and Black Power movements, the 1945 Pan-African Congress, and the Bandung conference. It is also marked by the attainment of independence by most Caribbean, Asian and African countries from White-European colonial powers, most notably Ghana in 1957 and Guinea in 1958. Additionally, the organization of the United Nations and countless armed and nonviolent protests emerged throughout the world.²⁶

It is probable that the era of Black consciousness from 1945 to 1975 propelled the Nation of Islam into the general American public’s view and eventually into international awareness. Placing the Nation of Islam within this era of heightened awareness, as a historical framework, situates it into an expansive global movement and a dialogue between people of African descent, which is broadened through Islam thus taking it out of many of the one-dimensional interpretations previously offered by scholars who have written about the Nation.

Contextualizing the Rise of the Nation

If Elijah Muhammad had not been, we would not be. I feel very strongly about that . . . Black power came from Elijah Muhammad . . . I mean, no one called themselves Black until Elijah Muhammad said, 'Black Man.'²⁷

--Elizabeth Shabazz

Many of the underlying principles framing the Nation of Islam's theological and even political ideology find roots in the works of David Walker and Edward W. Blyden.²⁸ The Nation, like Walker and Blyden, seriously analyzed and challenged America's hypocrisy and Judeo-Christian philosophy and their influence on or obstruction to Black consciousness.²⁹ Conceivably, it was residual ideology of Walker's message, generally forgotten or unknown to the masses of Black people that possibly advanced the Nation into domestic and international prominence during the era of Black consciousness.³⁰ Although there were insignificant numbers of Blacks who belonged to several minor Islamic communities prior to the establishment of the Nation of Islam, most notably the Moorish Science Temple in 1913 and the Ahmadiyya movement in 1920, the Nation was single-handedly responsible for Islam's revitalization and significant growth in the United States among Black Americans from 1945 until 1975.³¹ However, the original Nation began in the 1930s, "during an era of hunger, discontent, anguish, and disillusionment;" as a result the Nation struggled for its continuance.³² Prior to the 1930s, Blacks were assailed at home and abroad. Acts of violence against Black soldiers and other community members ran high as demonstrated by the increase of lynching and White invasions of Black communities resulting in race riots. The most popular depiction of the intensity of

racial conflicts occurred during the Red Summer of 1919.³³ By many accounts, life for Blacks after World War I remained stagnant and in some cases even deteriorated.

Clearly, the 1930s proved no better than the pre-Depression era. The already poor economic conditions of the Black community worsened. Many Black people left the South because of the lack of economic opportunities and the prevalence of violence, but they left with the hopes of finding a better life in the North.³⁴ This mass migration proved a key element in the origins and success of the Nation of Islam.³⁵ Scholars agree, that “a significant number of the early converts of the Nation of Islam were recent migrants from the southern section of the United States . . . [who] became potential recruits when their expectations of economic mobility and political power were not met.”³⁶ Though both socially and economically challenging for Blacks, this era proved to perhaps be one of the more progressive times in United States history for other Americans.³⁷ Advancements were evident by the creation of President Roosevelt’s New Deal, the Social Security act of 1935, the establishment of the Works Progress Administration, and other government initiated socioeconomic relief programs. These programs, however, overwhelmingly served more Whites than Blacks. According to Nell Irvin Painter, as a result of these programs American workers earned the right to unionize, laws were enacted that supported small farmers, and a standard wage was set among other government supported programs. But, “the New Deal was not intended to be especially friendly to black people, nor was it ever.”³⁸

Yet, in light of this so-called sociopolitical productive era, Black people struggled to maintain some of their most basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. Because of increasing hardships, due in large part to a combination of unemployment, rising discrimination, poor health, and limited access to quality education, some Blacks turned to prostitution, drugs and gambling, others to violent crime, and still others looked for a kind of savior.³⁹ Consequently, the 1920s and 1930s were replete with self-proclaimed prophets, messengers and liberators, “divinely” inspired and sent to the formerly enslaved people in the Americas to ease their sociopolitical, economic and spiritual suffering.⁴⁰ One of the more popular leaders during this period was Marcus Garvey. Although he founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (U.N.I.A.) in New York in 1918 it had reached its zenith by 1920.⁴¹ Another was Daddy Grace, known as Charles Emanuel Grace, who appeared in 1925 declaring himself “a Holiness preacher . . . He founded and organized the United House of Prayer for All People, with congregations in some twenty cities on the East Coast.”⁴² Grace was followed by ‘Father Divine,’ the founder of the “Divine Peace Mission Movement, [and a man], believed to be God by his followers.”⁴³ Indeed, “the dramatic changes in the form and content of Black religious life during the 1920s and 1930s constitute such an extraordinarily rich moment in which unanticipated ways of living in the world . . . emerged in the face of transforming social forces.”⁴⁴ The Nation of Islam was, too, such a force.

Black women were among the first to hear the message and join the Nation of Islam.⁴⁵ In 1930, Wallace Fard Muhammad encountered Black women

as he traveled around peddling various good in Detroit's mostly black community, Paradise Valley.⁴⁶ Once inside their homes, Fard shared his divinely inspired message for his socio-religious cause. Both women and men were highly intrigued by his ideas and quickly joined his mission. Yet, "not all who attended the meetings and heard . . . the message accepted him as a prophet. Many ridiculed his attacks against Caucasians and were angered by criticisms of the churches and the preachers."⁴⁷ Nevertheless, scholars estimate by 1934, he had more than 8,000 followers in Detroit alone.⁴⁸

Among Fard's new recruits were Clara and Elijah Muhammad. In 1932, Clara Muhammad, born Clara Evans, and Elijah Muhammad, born Elijah Poole met Fard.⁴⁹ After hearing him speak, Clara and Elijah became his most devout students.⁵⁰ Fard taught both Clara and Elijah about the "origins" of the nations and their place as a Muslim man and woman in the world.⁵¹ He also instructed Elijah in being a husband, father, and teacher while instructing Clara in the cooking of healthy foods and keeping house, efforts that would later evolve into the Fruit of Islam (F.O.I.) for men and the Muslim Girls in Training (M.G.T.) for women, respectively.⁵² It is important to note, that some scholars argue it was Clara Muhammad who first met Fard Muhammad. They also suggest that it was she who initially joined and later brought her husband Elijah to meet him.⁵³ Whatever the case may have been, both enlisted in the emerging community, and by 1934, Clara and Elijah Muhammad were its newly appointed leaders.⁵⁴ Theories regarding the circumstances surrounding Fard's abrupt departure and Clara and Elijah's ascension to power remain shrouded in myth.⁵⁵ Arguably, the

mysterious disappearance of Fard augmented the authenticity of Clara and Elijah Muhammad's claims as Fard's newly ascribed divinity and Elijah's role as his messenger. Over the next eleven years, from 1934 to 1945, Elijah Muhammad, along with his companion and helpmate, Clara Muhammad, further developed the Nation of Islam.⁵⁶

Clara and Elijah Muhammad's first few years as leaders of the Nation were tumultuous.⁵⁷ Alongside their followers, they were repeatedly harassed by police and other law enforcement agents.⁵⁸ One major altercation involved Detroit public school officials who charged Clara and Elijah Muhammad, as well as other Muslim parents and teachers, with contributing to the delinquency of minors as a result of removing Muslim children from the public school system.⁵⁹ "An attempt by the Board of Education and the police to arrest Muslim teachers and close the University of Islam resulted in an uprising in which Muslims tried to take over Detroit police headquarters by force."⁶⁰ This act alone placed Clara and Elijah Muhammad as forerunners within the Black alternative school movement during that period, which mostly Catholics and Quakers had taken advantage. In 1932, they established the first Nation school within their home until they were able to secure a larger structure that would house both the school and Temple.⁶¹

Clara and Elijah Muhammad were forced out of the Detroit community in 1934 by religious contenders and the local police, but still able to maintain a following with the help of those most loyal to W.D. Fard. Driven out of Detroit, Clara and Elijah Muhammad sought sanctuary in nearby Chicago where they

established the Nation of Islam headquarters, Mosque No. 2, and the second University of Islam. Subsequently, according to Nation of Islam records, while leaving his family in Chicago, Elijah Muhammad consistently moved around trying to establish temples in places like Washington, D.C., Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and other cities. While Clara Muhammad all the while maintained and gave directions in Chicago.⁶² His travels enabled him to make alliances with people from all walks of life, which aided his recruitment efforts much later.⁶³ Although they had limited education, both Clara and Elijah Muhammad were self taught, and encouraged all their followers to become similarly educated not only in Islam but also their own history.

In Washington, D.C. Elijah Muhammad studied everything he could on the religion of Islam along with other subjects of importance, such as Mathematics, Astrology, and Health.⁶⁴ During these long absences in the early days of the movement, Clara Muhammad oversaw the daily operations of the steadily growing community and simultaneously maintained her family.⁶⁵ Although women were most certainly rigorously involved in the development of the group, during its nascent years, written records are not available that provide details of those women and men except for Clara and Elijah Muhammad. This remained an issue until the early 1960s.

Regressing, by 1942, the United States armed forces were drafting Black men into the war effort in unprecedented numbers. Elijah Muhammad and many of his followers had been successful at avoiding the war by finding refuge with sympathizers in various cities like Baltimore, Milwaukee and Washington D.C.

They refused to fight a war for people they called their “open enemy.”⁶⁶ That same year, although beyond the draft, Muhammad, along with his son and other Nation men, was apprehended for avoiding the draft and inciting so-called ‘sedition’.⁶⁷ With her husband, son and a number of other Muslim men imprisoned, Clara Muhammad was responsible for leading the fledgling community for a much longer period than she had in the past; still over the next few years, she single handedly ensured the survival of the group and her family by keeping the school in operation, continuing recruitment efforts and providing direction to the community.

While in prison, Elijah Muhammad reformed many of his fellow inmates and invited them to formally join the Nation of Islam upon their release.⁶⁸ Clara Muhammad visited Elijah Muhammad and the other men who were incarcerated with him. Elijah gave her detailed instructions that she carried back to the Nation laborers.⁶⁹ On her frequent visits, she brought food, and handwritten copies of the Quran, the holy book of Muslims, as they were still not considered a legitimate religious group within the prison system, and, therefore, were not allowed access to Muslim religious materials or proper foods. Clara Muhammad also kept the school, Muhammad University of Islam, and other programs successfully functioning.⁷⁰ In 1946, Elijah Muhammad, released from prison, returned to vigorously building up the Nation membership by opening temples, establishing more businesses, purchasing farmland, and reaching out to prisoners. Clara Muhammad then turned the majority of her attention to the

Nation's schools and homebuilding initiatives, helping to raise funds and secure resources.⁷¹

Over the next twenty-nine years, from 1946 until 1975, Clara and Elijah Muhammad worked to fortify the community. The main power base of the early Nation from 1930 to 1945 was predominately in the North, though during its most prominent years from 1945 to 1975, it rapidly spread West and South. While the Nation of Islam was extremely distinct in its implementation, longevity, and success, it did not exist in a vacuum. Their sociopolitical, educational, and nationalistic ideologies were built upon earlier movements like those directed by Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, Noble Drew Ali, and Marcus Garvey. Most importantly, I contend the Nation successfully married the ideological strategies of W.E.B. Du Bois' support for classical education and Booker T. Washington's program of self-help.⁷² Therefore, the historical events that transpired before 1945 are particularly significant in understanding the growing popularity of the Nation of Islam during the era of Black consciousness and eventually the apex and the roles women, like Clara Muhammad, critically played in the establishment and advancement of the mission of the community.

Though the Nation of Islam came about in the early 1930s, the time immediately following World War II was nonetheless a defining moment in its history.⁷³ The struggle for global independence by nonwhite people under centuries of white rule alongside heightened mistreatment and exploitation of Blacks in America helped advance the Nation of Islam and position it as a major force in the history of Blacks in America. It was in this postwar era that Black

Americans began to seriously take notice that nothing had or would change for them either in pecuniary or political and educational matters unless they did something, perhaps forceful, about it themselves.

Flanking these realizations was the “Red Scare” of the late 1940s and 1950s, complicating an already highly charged environment. After 1946, racial confrontations in the U.S. quickly escalated as Blacks became more impatient with the slow progress of democracy and social justice and whites attempted to beat back all movement toward racial equality. Jim Crow segregation remained entrenched in the South, racial discrimination continued to hold sovereign in the North and West, while Asian, Caribbean and African countries continued to make important steps to rid their countries of outside white European-American hegemony.⁷⁴ Even amongst the rising turmoil, victory abroad provided a brief but propitious atmosphere as American combatants returned from abroad. But, once the fanfare and joy of triumph had abated, Black soldiers on their return home after World War II became seriously disappointed and even incensed to find that their socioeconomic and political conditions had altered little from their pre-war conditions. Many of these soldiers became Nation followers in the 1960s.⁷⁵ Those working in factories and other jobs available during the war now found themselves without employment. “White anxieties about returning Black soldiers were high, especially in the South.”⁷⁶ Moreover, “a wave of intimidation, terror, and death upon African Americans . . . lasted for much of 1946 and 1947.”⁷⁷ In July 1946 “two young Negroes, one a veteran just returned from the war and their wives were lined up . . . and shot to death by an unmasked band of twenty

white men . . . [T]he bodies were scarcely recognizable from the mass of bullet holes.”⁷⁸

Even the 1954 Supreme Court ruling of *Brown vs. the Board of Education* did little to immediately change the reality for Black people in the United States.⁷⁹ In fact, the ruling resulted in heightened white aggression and increased Black displacement and even deaths.⁸⁰ A year later, in 1955, thirteen-year-old Emmett Till was lynched in Money, Mississippi, and the Montgomery bus boycott sparked the nonviolent civil rights movement.⁸¹

Much like the recent tumultuous post-911 period, the Cold War era, usually noted as ranging from 1945 to the early 1990s, was a strenuous time for newly converted Muslims. Under the watchful eye of United States government officials, the Nation of Islam members were constantly harassed and beleaguered.⁸² Over the span of fifteen years from 1930 to 1945, Clara and Elijah Muhammad, as well as other Nation men and women, were jailed for fictitious allegations, spanning from contributing to delinquency of minors to charges of sedition. Muslims’ efforts to deliver themselves from oppression frequently thwarted while attempting to save themselves and their children from intellectual and spiritual death. Likewise, efforts to start their own schools were met with great violence from the establishment resulting in mass arrests, the continuous closing down of their schools, and generally heightened hostility.⁸³ Still, law enforcement was not their only detractor. Some civil rights leaders also spoke out against the community and even Black churches barred them from using their facilities in many areas for fear of retribution by whites.⁸⁴

In the midst of these obstacles, the NOI continued to expand and those who converted by accepting the teachings of Elijah Muhammad disconnected from the matrix of the historically significant Christian theology and lifestyle of their families.⁸⁵ The Nation of Islam leadership's critical rebuff of Christianity provided newly converted Muslims the opportunity to plot their own spiritual course through the turbulent times of their experience in the West. At times, this alternative way of life was met with great hostility even within the Black community as "members of a family . . . split and broke down . . . into two conflicting parties where elimination of the dissenter from the family circle [was] the general result."⁸⁶ Sister Majidah, a member of the Nation during the late 1950s, explained, "when I came home and told my parents I joined the Nation of Islam they told me I could not stay there anymore . . . they were devout Christians . . . [When I became Muslim] a lot of people thought I was crazy." Still while the estrangement and banishment of Sister Majidah by her family was not uncommon given the social and religious milieu of the early 1930s through 1950s, not all women were treated so harshly. It is obvious given the narratives of Nation women that some families supported their daughters' new way of life but remained staunch Christians themselves, and others had family that eventually elected to join the Nation.⁸⁷ Yet, despite these and similar experiences, Black women continued to join the Black Muslim community during the post-World War II era.

At the close of 1940s and during the early 1950s, amid growing discontent among Blacks, Clara and Elijah Muhammad's insulated community grew strong.

Between 1946 and 1975, the Nation established and reformed already existing socioeconomic programs such as farms, department stores, import-export businesses, rental housing, food processing centers, restaurants, and schools [which were popularly called 'universities'], clothing factories, banks, aviation companies, health care centers, temples, in the U.S. and abroad, and perhaps most notably the leadership training units of the Fruit of Islam (F.O.I.), and Muslim Girls in Training (M.G.T.). Though rarely documented, women such as Lottie X, Ethel Sharieff and later Beverly Maraud were integral to the development and success of these efforts.⁸⁸

During this time, Clara and Elijah Muhammad also used the Black media to disseminate their message of self-determination and critical Black consciousness in several weekly columns in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, *New Amsterdam News* and *Los Angeles Herald Dispatch*.⁸⁹ These mediums aided the group in soliciting followers a means of exposure that other groups before this period were unable to take advantage. Much of the white "media's interest [in the Nation of Islam] was induced by the uniqueness of the group [and the severity of its critique of whites] . . . It had never occurred to most White people that some Blacks [would] reject Christianity, and it certainly was never suspected that anyone Black could believe that Caucasians were inferior to the country's former slaves."⁹⁰

By 1960, the Nation began to publish its own newspaper entitled *Muhammad Speaks*, which gave individuals like Tynetta and Christine Muhammad and other Muslim women a platform to voice their views. Their

contributions will be extensively discussed in chapter 5. The publication of this paper widened their audience and helped expand the group's philosophy and religious doctrine. Fittingly, "for over forty-five years the Nation of Islam was the most significant black . . . organization in the United States. The organization combined an economic program to uplift . . . black pride through identification with ancient . . . African societies, and separatism as a solution to economic inequality."⁹¹

From the late 1960s to 1975, alongside the Nation of Islam, other political groups emerged like the "US" organization created by Maulana Karenga, and the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. Nevertheless, these organizations, although nationalistic, were vastly different in their approaches from the Nation and not as successful in their ability to sustain a thriving and economically productive organization or community.⁹² The latter years of the apex also offered some problems for the Nation of Islam as inner strife escalated, harassment by police and FBI heightened, and new kinds of adherents joined, some of whom were seen as opportunists who saw the Nation as an economic and political "gravy train."⁹³

The post-World War II era of Black consciousness started in 1945, reached its apex in 1965, began its descent following the death of Clara Muhammad in 1972, and finally is marked by the death of Elijah Muhammad in 1975—in many ways Clara was considered the First Lady of the Nation and Elijah the Prime Minister of Black consciousness post Marcus Garvey.⁹⁴ Elijah Muhammad passed away in February 1975. Within a few days of his passing, W.

D. Muhammad became the next Nation of Islam leader—within less than a year of his ascendance to leadership, Muhammad systematically reconfigured the community his father built and renamed the University of Islam after his mother, Sister Clara Muhammad. Muhammad, in essence, “reorganized, denationalized, and decentralized the Nation of Islam into World Community of Al-Islam [later called the American Muslim Mission].”⁹⁵ By the end of 1975, major shifts in the Nation were taking it in a radically different direction from the one Clara and Elijah Muhammad had led, causing it to lose the sociopolitical edge or militancy for which it had become legendary. Moreover, during this same period the government had successfully neutralized the Black Panther Party, Black Liberation Army, and other Black nationalists groups within the United States, while white Europeans had ushered in a neo-colonialism in Africa and the Caribbean.⁹⁶ Kwame Nkrumah in his text *Neocolonialism*, Walter Rodney’s *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, and Frantz Fanon’s *White Skin Black Mask* and others, argued that a neo-colonialism throughout Asia and Africa had taken hold, consequently dashing hopes for total independence and self-determination resulting in the end of the apex. Nkrumah proposed that:

Neo-colonialism . . . represents imperialism in . . . perhaps its most dangerous stage . . . The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside.⁹⁷

The 1970s’ racially charged backlash towards Blacks in the United States and the parallel global expansion of neocolonialism provided a disturbing testament even amidst the great heights achieved at the apex of Black

consciousness and the critical contributions to its summit made by the Nation of Islam. Clara and Elijah Muhammad were innovative and deliberate community builders who instilled strong beliefs in the vitality of Black consciousness and the viability of self-determination in a way that impacted the Black Diaspora even beyond the members who were their adherents. Clara Muhammad was a “heroine” and symbol for all movement women, and her early labors and sacrifices helped to stabilize the community, particularly in contributing to the alternative school movement.⁹⁸ Elijah Muhammad’s teachings and guidance contributed to the growth and development of Islam in America, Black Studies, and economic self-reliance.⁹⁹ It was during the era of Black consciousness that the Nation grew rapidly throughout the country expanding across more than sixty United States cities and abroad.¹⁰⁰ The Nation of Islam’s most visible accomplishments and an attestation to their importance can still be seen in the institutions that remain like the Clara Muhammad schools and through some of their most iconic spokespersons, like Louis Farrakhan, Muhammad Ali, and Malcolm X.

The Nation may be accurately described as a grassroots, self-organized Muslim group that functioned as one of the most significant and peaceful socio-cultural-religious transformers in the Black community by successfully overhauling the lives of many of its adherents through its highly disciplined healthcare, educational, and economic programs. Many adherents proclaim it was a “life-giving” experience. For well over seventy-eight years the legacy of the community has influenced the way Black people in the United States have come

to envision themselves. The original Nation of Islam operated under the brief leadership of Wallace Fard from 1930 to 1934, and then directed by Elijah Muhammad from 1934 to 1975. It then morphed into the World Community of Al-Islam in the West headed by W.D. Muhammad from 1975 until 2008.¹⁰¹ A few years after W.D. Muhammad's ascension to the leadership, several of the original Nation of Islam members became unhappy with Muhammad's massive changes, and a few left to start their own groups including: John Muhammad's Nation of Islam, younger brother of Elijah Muhammad; Silis Muhammad's Lost Found Nation of Islam; and Jeremiah Shabazz and John Ali's Nation of Islam Council of Elders. Although Farrakhan's Nation of Islam started off like the previous mentioned splinter groups, his "position as the National Spokesman for the Honorable Elijah Muhammad and his obvious gifts as a minister enabled him to soon outflank, outrank, and out-recruit all of his competitors." Thus, Farrakhan was able to assume the historical moniker [discarded by W.D. Muhammad] of the original Nation of Islam claiming it for his community."¹⁰² There was no attempt by women to start any splinter groups.

I disagree, to a point, with other Nation scholars who argue that the original Nation of Islam was simply a Black Nationalist group. This disagreement is vital, as framing the Nation of Islam largely within the genre of American Black nationalism has limited our understanding of the group as it relates to its global impact, especially in how the notion of Black self-determination was linked to Islam. Though much of its platform was nationalistic the Nation of Islam posited itself as a global Islamic community inclusive of all people of the Asiatic nation,

all of whom the Nation saw as inherently Muslim, particularly, Black people. In practice, it was an Islamic group made up mostly of Blacks in the United States, with members and supporters from Europe, Caribbean, and across the continents of Asia and Africa. While surely adherents of the Nation operated a society that valued community life, high moral character, economic independence, self-determination, self-love, discipline and unity, it above all else heralded fealty to Islam.

Members of the Nation changed the religious and cultural face of the United States. Christianity no longer remained entrenched in the lives of all Black people, identified by proponents of the Nation as a means of suppression and/or system of control. Black Islam reformed 20th century Black Christianity because it challenged and revised it in a way that pushed Blacks to re-evaluate and examine their faith. One Nation member mused: "I left Christianity because I have been convinced that Christianity is not in the interest of our people . . . It teaches us that salvation will be in the after-life while we need salvation in this life. . . . It tries to keep us inferior and accept all these injustices."¹⁰³ Also, altered was Black cuisine. Muslims do not cook anything containing pork; the consumption of it is prohibited. Muslims would not even eat at a restaurant or frequent stores (if at all) that served pork. Muslims were encouraged to avoid canned or frozen food whenever possible and only to eat fresh killed meat and fresh fruits and vegetables.¹⁰⁴ Women were instrumental in introducing new foods into the Black diet such as navy bean soup, carrot cake, bean pie, carrot soufflé, Muslim rice, lamb and whole wheat bread.¹⁰⁵ The Nation was also a

large importer of Whiting, a fish from Peru, into Black neighborhoods.¹⁰⁶

Changes were also evident in their ideas about Black education, the United States political system, and white European-American morality. The socio-cultural face of Black people was altered, resulting in the expiration of the term “Negro,” making the term “Black” one of empowerment and pride, not disparagement. Jesse Jackson argued, “Elijah Muhammad was the father of Black self-consciousness. During our Coloured and Negro days he was Black.”¹⁰⁷ In reference to the cultural milieu of the 1950s, one Nation member posited “if you called somebody Black they would try to punch you in your mouth . . . that was not something to be proud of,” according to most Blacks.¹⁰⁸ Those who became Muslims saw themselves as righteous human beings whose “natural” religion or way of life was Islamic, meaning total submission to God. Consequently, the Nation of Islam in its preceding years, from 1930 to 1945, helped to lay the groundwork for the era of Black consciousness in the United States ranging from 1945 to 1975.

The original Nation of Islam spanned from 1930 to 1975, and women were an integral part of the community from its meager beginnings.¹⁰⁹ By the start of 1975, the community had grown to over one million and a significant number of those adherents were Black women.¹¹⁰ When a Black woman enlisted in the Nation of Islam, she became a part of a religiosity that envisioned the Black woman as someone to be “respected and protected” not denigrated and abused as had been her legacy in the United States for decades.¹¹¹ Before joining the community it was common practice, as one study participant shared, “for a

woman to be knocked around or slapped for almost any reason. I myself had been [a victim] of that before the Nation . . . Protection was also important because women and men too would be [accosted] by whites for no [reason] in those days.”¹¹² It was not only women’s physical health that was in danger; Nation women also faced other obstacles—e.g. issues of financial instability, barriers to adequate education, access to leadership positions etc.—all of which they secured under the cloak of the Nation.

Overview of Chapters

This dissertation explores several major facets of the Nation of Islam and the role and contribution of women within its history. First, I offer a discussion about the research process undertaken for this study and my location as a researcher. Second, I analyze the historiography of the original Nation of Islam. Third, I critically explore why women entered, persisted and departed the community. Fourth, I provide an examination of the efforts of Nation women that contributed to the educational programs of the Nation and the critical links to the home. Fifth, I offer a close examination of the ideologies and sociopolitical views of women, as evidenced in their journalistic contributions to *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper. Lastly, I present a description of Nation women’s participation in the international dialogue regarding the state, development and agenda of self-determination of the Black Diaspora during the era of Black consciousness.

Chapter 1, “Methodology, Theoretical Framework and Discussion of Sources,” provides details of the launch of my dissertation research and the experiences garnered trying to seek out research participants and primary

documentation. I provide information about the interviewees, cities, research sites and repositories visited to procure data and participants. This chapter also presents the overall methodology and theoretical framework underscoring the study. Chapter 2, "To Gain A Place in the Sun: The Historiography of the Original Nation of Islam," provides an extensive review of the most significant secondary works published on the original Nation of Islam. It analyzes how each author seriously underscored, grappled with or ignored the contributions and experiences of Nation of Islam women. Specifically, I give an overview of each text, critically scrutinize the sources used, analyze the asserted, and challenge whether these scholars present an accurate view of the Nation of Islam. The texts explored range of time from 1961 to 2009, with men writing the great majority of the manuscripts published on the Nation of Islam.

Chapter 3, "A Voice from the East: Women, Islam and Gender Capital," offers an analysis of the push and pull factors that prompted women to enlist, remain and leave the Nation of Islam.¹¹³ In accordance with African American Studies and by extension Africana Womanism, which allows women the agency to speak for themselves, this section provides narratives by Nation women that briefly describe the experiences of officials alongside rank-and-file members who allied with the Nation of Islam between 1945 and 1975. The individuals highlighted stand out because of the longevity of their membership, influence, work and assistance in the building of the Nation programs.

Chapter 4, "We Must Teach Our Own: Women as Primary and Pioneering Agents of Black Consciousness," consist of three parts. The first

segment offers a discussion about the history the Nation schools and the roles women held in establishing those enterprises; documenting the struggles that Nation members encountered in endeavoring to educate their own children first in their homes and eventually their own autonomous institutions. This is especially significant given that the majority of Black leaders and organizations during the period, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and National Urban League, attempted to integrate majority white public schools instead of further creating and supporting Black self-directed institutions. Educational efforts in the early part of Nation's history were vital as home-schooling was illegal in many states, particularly Michigan, the site of the first Nation school. It was not until the 1990s that this law was overturned. Consequently, alternative schooling initiatives, like private, parochial and boarding schools during the 1930s through 1950s, were commonly reserved for the relatively wealthy. The fact that Nation of Islam followers were Black, mostly blue-collar workers, Muslim, and poor was extremely noteworthy. Nation women played a major if not central role in the establishment of educational institutions. The second part critically explores the educational programs of the Nation, a critical site of consciousness-raising and, therefore, places women at the center as powerful purveyors of Black consciousness.

The third part of this chapter places Nation Women in the continuum of Black women's activism during this period. Offered here is a general discussion of Nation of Islam women in relation to their contemporaries who filled the ranks of integrationist groups like Daisy Bates, who played an integral part in the

desegregation of schools, and Ella Baker who dedicated her life to working with integrationist groups like Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the NAACP. Although Baker and Bates were two of the most popular 20th century models of Black integrationist women, they did share common ground with their Muslim sisters, which was the alleviation of the sociopolitical oppression of the masses of Black people. In some ways the major differences or divide between these two camps, integrationists and self-determinists, is a replica of the ideological divide toward emancipation between W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington in the early part of the 20th century. I do not necessarily offer a new analysis of these two pioneering women, however, I do provide the first comparative examination between Black integrationist and Black Muslim self-determinist women during the period from 1945 to 1975. Consequently, this chapter addresses several questions. How did the experiences of Nation women compare to women who were Black integrationist? Where did their ideologies converge and diverge?

Chapter 5, "Raising Her Voice: The Contributions of Women in *Muhammad Speaks* Newspaper, 1961-1975," consists of two parts and focuses on the ideologies and sociopolitical views of women in the Nation of Islam as evidenced in their journalistic contributions to *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper, a critical primary source that has been underexplored by scholars to date. It provides an important site to examine women's voices during a socio-cultural and politically tumultuous time. I sample *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper articles over this fourteen-year span, considering articles that were *by*, *for* and *about* women.

In exploring these written records, I locate women's voices in a variety of context, no matter how seemingly trivial or immaterial some may consider these voices. Women writers in *Muhammad Speaks* responded to topics and issues relevant to Blacks at home and abroad in the 1960s and early 1970s. Nation women as part of the vanguards of the community demonstrated their activism in a number of ways including: education, dress, choice of religion, the rebuff of the white normative models of beauty, diet, resistance to welfare programs, and public education.

Part II of Chapter 5 offers a serious assessment of the relationship between the Nation of Islam and other nonwhite nations throughout the world. Contrary to what some scholars have suggested, the Nation of Islam saw the struggle of the Black man in America inextricably tied to the fate of people of color, particularly Muslims, in the rest of the world, more specifically continental Africa. In the 1960s and 1970s, and possibly even earlier, members of the Nation had a strong interest in African-Asian affairs and were greatly concerned with the political climate of various African and Asian countries. Nation literature was replete with references to Africa and other parts of the Afro-Asian world.

The Nation of Islam members sought alliances with nonwhite people throughout the world. Given the fertile ground for these sociopolitical coalitions during the era of Black consciousness, the Nation, from the late 1950s through the 1970s, and thereafter, was able to build a global partnership with several leaders in countries such as Egypt and Jamaica. This section is concerned with the relationship between the Nation of Islam, particularly women, in the U.S. and

their counterparts in other parts of the world. Few scholarly works have been completed on the international significance of the Nation of Islam—this final segment attempts to fill that void. Nation of Islam women’s written narratives will be used throughout the chapter to provide much of the information about the Nation of Islam’s domestic and global initiatives. Finally, the conclusion provides a summary of the study as well as future directions.

The following major questions will be considered in this dissertation: Why did women join the Nation of Islam? How did their roles change overtime, 1945-1975? What were the gender dynamics within the community? What educational programs did the NOI offer and what role did women play in their implementation? What concrete ways do we observe Nation women involved in activism? How do they use their activism within their homes? How did Nation women’s experiences compare to other Black women? Where do their ideologies converge and diverge? What were Nation women’s views regarding identity, education, and health?¹¹⁴ In examining the international importance of the Nation I consider: What was the relationship between the Nation of Islam and rest of the nonwhite world? What global leaders supported their efforts and why? How did these alliances impact the era of Black consciousness? How can we juxtapose the Nation of Islam’s agenda with other nonwhite nations of the world during that period? How did Nation women dialogue about and with other women throughout the Afro-Asian world?

NOTES

¹ Sonia Sanchez, *Ima Talken Bout The Nation Of Islam* (New York: Truth Del. Corp., 1971).

² *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook* (Chicago: Muhammad Temple No. 2, 1973).

³ September 11, 2001 Muslim terrorist crashed commercial airlines into the "Twin Towers" in New York City, the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. and Pittsburg, PA resulting in the loss of hundreds of American lives. Since September 11, 2001 hundreds of books and articles have been published on orthodox Islam, Women in orthodox Islam, Islamic Fundamentalism, and Islam vs. Christianity. For discussions about Islam in America see Steven Emerson, *American Jihad: The Terrorists Living Among Us* (New York: Free Press, 2003); Daniel Pipes, *Militant Islam Reaches America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003); Carolyn Moxley Rouse, *Engaged Surrender: African American Women and Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Allen Verbrugge, ed. *Muslims in America* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005).

⁴ Daniel Pipes, *Militant Islam Reaches America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003).

⁵ There was a significant religious backlash after September 11, 2001. Countless Muslims were victims of violent crimes. Articles depicting Islam as an "evil and violent" religion seemed to support a popular consensus among many. Laura Goodstein, "Seeing Islam as Evil Faith, Evangelicals Seek Converts," *New York Times*, May 27, 2003; Gustav Niebuhr, "Study Finds Number of Mosques Up 25% in 6 years," *New York Times*, April 27, 2001; *The Washington Times*, "Bush and Muslims," October 30, 2003. Nicholas D. Kristof, "Bigotry in Islam—And Here," *New York Times*, July 9, 2002. (Proquest Historical Newspapers).

⁶ Robert Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); See also Yvonne Haddad's, ed., *The Muslims of America*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991; Edward E. Curtis IV, ed., *The Columbia Sourcebook of Muslims in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). For statistics regarding Muslim population in U.S. see Verbrugge, *Muslims in America*.

⁷ According to Karl Evanzz by 1942 the FBI had over one million pages on the Nation of Islam and Elijah Muhammad, respectively. They accumulated a lengthy file on the community as a result of forty-three years of surveillance. Karl Evanzz, *The Messenger: The Rise and Fall of Elijah Muhammad* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999), 443; Also see Richard Brent Turner's discussion on the fear of Islam in the early 1920s. Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 116.

⁸ Turner, *Islam in the African American Experience*, 159 and Daniel Pipes, "How Elijah Muhammad Won," *Commentary*, 109 (2000): 31-36; Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound, American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), xvii.

⁹ For claims concerning the oppression of Muslim women see Christina Hoff Sommers, "The Subjection of Islamic Women," *The Weekly Standard*, May 21, 2007, 14-20. <http://www.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/>.

¹⁰ The cold war era is generally discussed as "largely an ideological struggle between the two superpowers, Russia and the U.S., both hoping to increase their power and influence across the globe." Manning Marable, *Reform and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1982* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1984). Marable's Second Reconstruction reframes the era yet remains a bit narrow in its summation by not envisioning the American Black experience as part of a more global trajectory. Perhaps these views, Cold War and Second Reconstruction, leave the interrelated, simultaneous and fundamental struggles of nonwhites during this epoch disconnected and almost extraneous. Such an expansion of our historical lens and analytical framework is imperative as I further explore the history of the Nation of Islam in the subsequent chapters.

¹¹ To be political means to be seriously interested in the political issues of the period, poverty, healthcare, education etc. particularly as it concerns Black people in America.

¹² See discussion concerning Maulana Karenga "US" organization and other Black Power groups in Jeffery O.G. Ogbar, *Black Power, Radical Politics and African American Identity*

(Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004). On narratives illuminating the experiences of Black women in Black Power organizations see Elaine Brown *Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (New York: Anchor Books, 1993); Ella Baker experiences with SCLC see Rosetta E. Ross, *Witnessing & Testifying, Black Women, Religion and Civil Rights* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 45. Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, Press, 2003).

¹³ Steven Biko, *I Write What I Like: A Selection of His Writings*, ed. Aelred Stubbs (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 29.

¹⁴ Lawrence H. Mamiya and C. Eric Lincoln, "The Nation of Islam," in *Muslims in America*, ed. Allen Verbrugge (Farmington, MI: Thomas Gale, 2005), 32.

¹⁵ There were obviously other movements prior to World War II that laid the ground work for the Black consciousness movement of the mid-twentieth century such as the work of Marcus Garvey and Noble Drew Ali but these movements were short-lived. The explosion of Black consciousness both in the U.S. and abroad occurs from 1945 to 1975.

¹⁶ Rayford W. Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir 1877-1901* (New York: The Dial Press, 1954), 52-53.

¹⁷ Marable, *Race, Reform and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1982*, 14.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ To my knowledge no other group grew with such tenacity and as quickly as the NOI nor did they have the same religious and cultural platform or life span between 1945 until 1975.

²⁰ This does not take away from the work of the early Pan-African congress meetings which actually helped to pave the way for the era of Black consciousness through its apex. The Pan-African Congress of 1945 was considered one of the most successful of all the meetings occurring immediately following World War II. See George Padmore, "Colonial and . . . Coloured Unity," in *The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress Revisited*, ed. George Padmore (London: New Beacon Books, 1995), 58 and 60.

²¹ I believe there are several works that support the notion that World War II was a catalyst for significant change both within the U.S. and abroad particularly as it concerns black consciousness and self-determination on a broad scale by the movement of people chiefly at the bottom. Brisbane refers to this period, 1954-1970 as a "racial revolution" and "a period of black awareness." Robert H. Brisbane, *Black Activism, Racial Revolution in the United States, 1954-1970* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1974), 8-9.

²² Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 6.

²³ Marable, *Race, Reform and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1982*, 12.

²⁴ *Ebony Magazine* "The Nation of Islam," March 1975, 76.

²⁵ Several scholars argue that many groups did not gain from the New Deal however scholars do agree there was marked improvement for a large part of society particularly farmers and that Blacks carried the full brunt of the economic crisis. Joe William Trotter, Jr., "From A Raw Deal to a New Deal? 1929-1945, in *To Make Our World Anew: A History of African Americans*, eds. Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 413-416; Burton W. Folsom, Jr. *New Deal or Raw Deal: How FDR's Economic Legacy Has Damaged America* (New York: Thresholds Edition, 2008), 10-11; Marable, *Race, Reform and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1982*, 13-14.

²⁶ Nell Irvin Painter, *Creating Black Americans: African-American History and its Meanings, 1619 to the Present* (New York: Oxford Press, 2006), 220-222; Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 79-81.

²⁷ Sister Elizabeth, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, December 2007.

²⁸ Both Walker and Blyden offer critiques of White Christians. David Walker, *David Walker's Appeal, To the Coloured Citizens of the World but in particular, and very expressly, to those of the United States* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1993), 33 and 88; Edward W. Blyden,

Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race (Great Britain: Edinburgh University Press, 1967), 12, 19 and 36.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Although both Christians, Walker and Blyden were both critical of Christianity related to the hypocrisy of Whites specifically as it relates to the liberation struggle of Blacks.

³¹ "Ahmadiyya movement" in Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience*, 114-115.

³² Clifton E. Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Transition from Separatism to Islam, 1930-1980* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1984), 38.

³³ The "Red Summer" constitutes one of the bloodiest periods in U.S. history when heightened White aggression resulted in countless Black deaths and race riots throughout the country. Specifically targeted were Black soldiers returning from WWI. Other riots included, Tulsa riot in 1921 and Rosewood in 1923. Painter, *Creating Black Americans*, 220-221; Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the Making of America* (New York: Collier Books, 1987), 192 -193; Stanley B. Norvell and William M. Tuttle, Jr., "Views of A Negro: 'The Red Summer of 1919,'" *The Journal of Negro History* 15 (1966): 210.

³⁴ Trotter, "From A Raw Deal to A New Deal? 1929-1945," 409-411.

³⁵ The Great Migration resulted in more than half a million people leaving the South going to the North and Midwest during World War I. See Painter, *Creating Black Americans, African-American History and its Meanings, 1619 to the Present*, 174-175.

³⁶ Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Transition from Separatism to Islam, 1930-1980*, 21; Erdmann Doane Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants in Detroit" *The American Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 6 (1938): 897.

³⁷ Trotter, "From A Raw Deal to A New Deal? 1929-1945," 417-418.

³⁸ Joe William Trotter, ed. *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class and Gender*, (Bloomington Indiana University Press, 1991); Painter, *Creating Black Americans, African-American History and its Meanings, 1619 to the Present*, 205-206.

³⁹ See economic condition of Blacks in the 1930s in Arna Bontemps and Jack Conroy, *They Seek a City* (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1945), 156-158.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Tony Martin, *Race First, The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Dover, MA: The Majority Press, 1976), 10.

⁴² Joseph R. Washington, Jr., *Black Sects and Cults* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 158-159.

⁴³ Arthur H. Fauset, *Black God's of the Metropolis, Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 52-55; Washington, *Black Sects and Cults*, 158-159.

⁴⁴ Eddie S. Glaude Jr., "Babel in the North: Black Migration, Moral Community and the ethics of Racial Authenticity," in *A Companion to African-American Studies*, eds. Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 502.

⁴⁵ As Fard was a peddler going door to door it makes sense that women would be his first contacts and potential converts. Clara Muhammad, like other Black women, is said to have heard the message before Elijah Muhammad. Ross, *Witnessing & Testifying, Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*, 145.

⁴⁶ Claude Andrew Clegg, III, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 21-22.

⁴⁷ Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants in Detroit," 897.

⁴⁸ It should be mentioned that Beynon was the definitive scholar on the early NOI but it is vital to note that in his work may conflate two communities, the offshoot NOI who consider themselves the true followers of W.D. Fard and those once called Temple People but later the Nation of Islam led by Elijah Muhammad. Little is known about the men and women adherents of Elijah Muhammad prior to 1945. In the 1930s and early 1940s the journalists consistently confused various political and religious communities that sprung up in Detroit and Chicago. The line between MST and NOI were clearly blurred in many writings. E.U. Essien Udom, *Black Nationalism, A Search for an Identity in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press,

1962), 83; Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants in Detroit," 897; Hakim B. Shabazz, *Essays on the Life & Teachings of Master Fard Muhammad: The foundation of the Nation of Islam* (Hampton, VA: United Brothers and United Sisters Communications Systems, 1990); Steven Tsoukalas, *The Nation of Islam: Understanding the Black Muslims'* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 53.

⁴⁹ Ross, *Witnessing & Testifying, Black Women, Religion and Civil Rights*, 146.

⁵⁰ Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 14-15; Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience*, 155-156; Clegg, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad*, 22-23.

⁵¹ Imam Muhammad, interview by author, Chicago, IL, October 2007.

⁵² Imam Muhammad, interview by author, Chicago, IL, October 2007.

⁵³ Evanzz, *The Messenger: The Rise and Fall of Elijah Muhammad*, 71.

⁵⁴ Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 12-14.

⁵⁵ Tsoukalas, *The Nation of Islam: Understanding the Black Muslims'*, 26-27.

⁵⁶ Simeon Booker, *Black Man's America* (Englewood Cliffs: NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 169

⁵⁷ Ross, *Witnessing & Testifying, Black Women, Religion and Civil Rights*, 146-147; Clegg, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad*, 97.

⁵⁸ Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants in Detroit," 897.

⁵⁹ The Islamic History Project Group, *A History of Muslim African Americans* (Chicago: WDM Publications, 2006), 124.

⁶⁰ Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience*, 167. The moniker 'university' was used by the Nation to signify that the "curricula was universal."

⁶¹ Islamic History Project Group, *A History of Muslim African Americans*, 124-125; Imam Muhammad, interview by author, Chicago, IL, October 2007; Sister Halimah, interview by author, Atlanta, GA, March 2008.

⁶² Imam Muhammad, interview by author, Chicago, IL, October 2007; See history of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Mosque No. 3 in Randal Omar Ali, "The Foundation: Women in the Nation of Islam," (MA Thesis, University of Iowa, 1998).

⁶³ Imam Muhammad, interview by author, Chicago, IL, October 2007.

⁶⁴ Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism, A Search for an Identity in America*, 238-239; Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 126-127.

⁶⁵ Clegg, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad*, 79.

⁶⁶ William Worthy, "The Angriest Negroes," *Esquire*, February 1961.

⁶⁷ Clegg, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad*, 84-86.

⁶⁸ Imam Muhammad, interview by author, Chicago, IL, October 2007 and Sister Halimah, interview by author, Atlanta, GA, March 2008; *Historical Documentary, A Historical Look at the Honorable Elijah Muhammad*, DVD, The Nation of Islam, 1975.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Imam Muhammad, interview by author, October 2007.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Donald General, "Booker T. Washington and Progressive Education: An Experimentalist Approach to Curriculum Development and Reform." *Journal of Negro Education* 69, no.3 (2000): 215-234, <http://www.istor.org/pss/2696233>; Mary Law Chaffe, "William E.B. Du Bois' Concept of the Racial Problem in the United States: The Early Negro Education Movement," *The Journal of Negro History* 41, no. 30 (1956): 241-258, <http://www.istor.org/stable/2715830>.

⁷³ Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line*, 32-33.

⁷⁴ James Mackie, *Bandung 1955: Non-alignment and Afro-Asian Solidarity* (Singapore: Didier Millet, 2005).

⁷⁵ A number of the men I interviewed had served in the armed forces particularly World War II prior to joining the NOI.

⁷⁶ Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line*, 42 and 54.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ralph Ginzburg, *100 Years of Lynchings* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1988), 238-239.

⁷⁹ Marable. *Race, Reform and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1982*, 42-44.

⁸⁰ Waltraut Stein, "The White Citizens Council," *The Negro History Bulletin* xx, no.1 (1956): 2.

⁸¹ The lynching of Emmett Till and Montgomery Bus Boycott are the two significant events that ignited the modern Civil Rights movement.

⁸² Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 128; Clegg, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad*, 258-259.

⁸³ *The Chicago Defender*, "Moors Battle in Court; 40 Hurt," March 9, 1935; "Hold Women Cult Members After Riot," March 16, 1935; "Cultists Guilty; 32 Given Jail Sentences," October 10, 1942; "6 Cultists Get 3-Year Sentences," April 17, 1943; "Sedition, Draft Evasions Up in Three Cities," December 5, 1942; "US Scrutinizes Books Seized in Cult Temple," October 17, 1942. Russell J. Cowans, "Seize 13 in Raid on Islam Cult," April 21, 1934 (ProQuest Historical Newspapers); The Nation of Islam, "Historical Documentary: A Historical Look at the Honorable Elijah Muhammad."

⁸⁴ *San Francisco Examiner*, "Methodist Lockout, Church Bans Negro Cult, August 10, 1959.

⁸⁵ Mamiya and Lincoln, *Muslims in America*, 32.

⁸⁶ Hatim A. Sahib. "The Nation of Islam" (MA Thesis, The University of Chicago, 1951), 111

⁸⁷ Sister Majidah, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, January 2008 and Brother Harold, Philadelphia, PA, June, 2008.

⁸⁸ Muhammad's Temple of Islam, ed. Malcolm X, *The Messenger Magazine*, 1959.

⁸⁹ Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Transition from Separatism to Islam, 1930-1980*, 62.

⁹⁰ Evanzz, *The Messenger: The Rise and Fall of Elijah Muhammad*, 196.

⁹¹ Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Transition from Separatism to Islam, 1930-1980*, 103.

⁹² Ogbar, *Black Power, Radical Politics and African American Identity*, 40.

⁹³ Sister Dela, interview by author, Atlanta, GA, March 2008.

⁹⁴ Jesse Jackson, "Elijah Muhammad's Significance and Passing," Saviour's Day Annual Convention, DVD, February 1975; William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon, The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 293.

⁹⁵ Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Transition from Separatism to Islam, 1930-1980*, 92.

⁹⁶ Ogbar, *Black Power, Radical Politics and African American Identity*, 69.

⁹⁷ Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, Ltd., 1965), ix; Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1972), 26-27.

⁹⁸ Evanzz, *The Messenger: The Rise and Fall of Elijah Muhammad*, 373.

⁹⁹ E. Curtis Alexander, *Elijah Muhammad on African American Education: A Guide for African and Black Studies Programs* (New York: ECA Associates, 1981), 52-54; Abul Pitre, *The Educational Philosophy of Elijah Muhammad: Education for a New World* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007), 23 and 43-45.

¹⁰⁰ Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Transition from Separatism to Islam, 1930-1980*, 125-135.

¹⁰¹ Prior to 1975 W.D. Muhammad spelled his name with a "u" like his parents. Some time after 1975 he began to spell it using "o" and replaced "a" with "e" in Muhammad. I will use Muhammad as his parents and previous scholars have used before 1975.

¹⁰² Imam Mubashir, conversation with author, April 2007.

¹⁰³ As quoted in Sahib, "The Nation of Islam," 135.

¹⁰⁴ Elijah Muhammad, *How to Eat to Live*, vol. I (Atlanta, GA: M.E.M.P.S., 1967); M.G.T., *Muslim Cookbook* (Chicago, Muhammad Temple No. 2, n.d.).

¹⁰⁵ As quoted in Sahib, "The Nation of Islam," 135 and 215.

¹⁰⁶ Larry 14X, "Muhammad Feeds the Multitude," in *Accomplishments of the Muslims*, ed. Charles 67X, 1975, 15, <http://www.croe.org/AccomplishmentsoftheMuslims.pdf>.

¹⁰⁷ Jesse Jackson, "Saviour's Day Address."

¹⁰⁸ Brother Richard, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, January 2008 and Brother Rafiq, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA., April 2007.

¹⁰⁹ Mamiya and Lincoln, *Muslims in America*, 28-32.

¹¹⁰ Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Transition from Separatism to Islam, 1930-1980*, 90.

¹¹¹ The Nation of Islam, "What Muslims Want and Believe" *The Nation of Islam's Official Guide to the Ministry* (Chicago: The Nation of Islam, 1998), 45; Elijah Muhammad. *Message to Blackman In America* (Virginia: United Brothers Communications Systems, 1965), 59.

¹¹² Brother Harold, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, June 2008

¹¹³ Several scholars discuss this idea of push-pull factors as it relates to the U.S. migration periods after WWI. None of the scholars to date have discussed the "push-pull factors" in any great detail as it concerns Black women who joined the Nation of Islam. Darlene Clark-Hine, William C. Hine and Stanley Harrold eds., 3rd. ed. *The African American Odyssey: Combined Volume* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006), 419; Trotter, *The Great Migration I Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class and Gender*.

¹¹⁴ See discussion on critical consciousness and education in Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1974).

CHAPTER 1

Methodology, Theoretical Framework, and Brief Discussion of Sources

This is an African American Studies social history with cultural, political, and religious subtexts. Grounded in Africana Womanism, this research considers important aspects of women's lives, public and private, as members of the original Nation of Islam (NOI) during what may be considered the era of black consciousness from 1945 to 1975.¹ Africana Womanism provides a critical lens through which to interpret and explore the experiences of the women of the Nation of Islam, specifically insofar as it initiates an opportunity to discern a far more accurate portrait of the historical realities of the lives and contributions of the Black Muslim woman as the "co-partner in the struggle for her people."²

While philosopher Nancy Hardstock's discussion of feminists objectives, specifically stand point theory, asserts "it is the differing roles assigned to women in society that results in their possession and mastery of different kinds of knowledge;" the primary goal of Africana Womanism is to allow Black women "to create their own criteria for assessing their realities [and modes of knowledge] both in thought and in action," particularly in regards to devalued female positions such as motherhood and wifery.³ Africana Womanism maintains that family and community are the bridge points on which women and men meet to help build a thriving and spiritually and economically lucrative society, a space that provides equal access and multiple modalities of success in a manner beneficial to each. In this context Africana Womanism recognizes and authenticates an analytical and descriptive framework that includes a "family-centered and race-

empowerment agenda . . . in contrast to other brands of feminism.”⁴ Through the analysis/investigation of the role of the “family-centered agenda” in the Nation of Islam’s advancement and thus its ultimate and significant contributions to the development of Black consciousness, this dissertation recalibrates the dominant view of Muslim women and unearths a prior unacknowledged power and privilege—gender capital—possessed and exercised by Black women. Indeed, as explored in subsequent chapters of this work, gender capital confers unique nobility and essential importance on Muslim women. To date, this is a perspective previously and wholly unexplored by scholars who have written about the Nation of Islam.

“A Nation Can Rise No Higher Than Its Women:’ The Critical Role of Black Muslim Women in the Development and Purveyance of Black Consciousness, 1945 -1975” rests squarely in the discipline of African American and African Studies, utilizing an African-centered historical analytic approach.

The idea of an African-centered approach is defined as:

[The] quality of thought or action that allows the African person to view himself or herself as an agent and actor in human history, not simply as someone who is acted upon. It provides a perspective from the subject place, not from the margins of being victims or being an object in someone else’s world. Thus, Africans are seen as creators, originators, and sustainers of ethics, values, and customs.⁵

Thus this study allows women to speak for themselves by allowing their voices to create the foreground for the work. In an examination of African-centered history, the main goal or outcome of study is “emancipatory knowledge.”⁶ Consequently, my goal in this study is to not simply uncover, interpret, and document, but also

(when necessary) to revise and decisively liberate the historiography of the Nation of Islam, particularly concerning women. By exposing gaps and distortions in this important area of the Black historical canon, I too am satisfying a desire to be an agent of liberation for Black people.

When conducting an analysis from an African-centered perspective, there are five points of intrinsic value that must be interrogated: “1) *Subject*, the place from which we view the world; 2) *Agent*, the self-conscious and self-determining casual force; 3) *Image*, the ideal form or mode rooted in cultural perspective, perception and values; 4) *Interests*, the benefits, rights and just claims shared with other humans (life, freedom, justice, self-determination etc.); and 5) *A consciousness of victory*, the awareness and recognition of agency and capability; the rejection of collective self doubt, and the ability and courage to overcome challenges and transcend difficulties.”⁷

Through its mission, doctrine, programs and activities, the Nation of Islam manifested a comprehensive embodiment of African-centeredness with respect to all five of the aforementioned value points. The Nation used an African-centered perspective to address the psychological, intellectual, physical, and spiritual needs of the Black community from 1945 to 1975. Its African-centered worldview placed all Black people at the center of the Nation’s programs, making it an ideal subject around which to focus my analysis. In many ways, this project is also “corrective.”⁸ The scholarship completed on the Nation of Islam to date, especially concerning women tends to be cursory and unabashedly negative. As a result, I hope to bring balance to this narrative and liberate perceptions of the

Nation and its women by offering a counter account that is a nuanced Africana-Womanist centered interpretation directly culled from a critical analysis of primary Nation sources and interviews.

By using Cheryl Townsend Gilkes and Deborah Gray White's works examining Black church and Civil Rights-Black Power women as historical models to re-tell Black Muslim women's stories, the primary methodology of this study is descriptive and at times corrective.⁹ It is a historical inquiry that utilizes four major kinds of data: 1) secondary sources; 2) primary sources (i.e., books, yearbooks, pamphlets, autobiographies, bulletins, letters, personal papers, obituaries, manuals, newspaper articles, FBI files, videos, surveys and speeches); 3) face-to-face, e-mail, and telephone structured and unstructured interviews; and 4) site visits and participant observations. Dialogues take place either electronically via email, or were recorded in person or documented by hand depending on the request of the interviewees.¹⁰ Three participants are from the researcher's immediate family. These individuals were active members in the Nation in the 1960s and 1970s. Some interviewees were pre-selected as they were family members of Clara and Elijah Muhammad. Other interviewees either held positions in the community or were rank-and-file community members. At least one interviewee appeared in Nation of Islam literature and was located on the Internet. Some were identified by other interviewees at the 2006 *American Society of Muslims* convention or recommended by other research participants.¹¹ All are former members of the original Nation of Islam. At least one was an original member and is also a current member of the reconstituted Nation.¹²

Years of involvement in the Nation ranged from five to over thirty years for research participants. In order to participate in this study research participants had to be in the community no less than five years in order to speak with some substantial authority about an NOI experience. I felt that any shorter time most likely meant they were not likely seriously involved in the community and affected the extent and manner in which they could discuss the impact, benefits, detriment, etc. from the belonging to the community. A few contributors had been previously suspended (temporarily) from the community. The real first names of interviewees have been used except where they have requested anonymity. As a final tool of data collection, the researcher administered surveys to twenty-five of the previously interviewed participants in order to gain a better understanding and further interrogate the gender dynamics within the community. The survey instrument was field-tested to ascertain its validity. Surveys results were anonymous and categorized by gender, year of entry into the Nation, and age. Of the twenty-five surveys mailed, eighteen were returned.

Participant-observations during meetings, prayer services, study groups, museum exhibitions, and Muslim conventions such as the former *American Muslim Mission Annual Convention* and Nation of Islam *Saviour's Day* were important to this study. These activities are long-standing and major events in the Black Muslim community. Cities in which participants in this study held membership in the Nation and research conducted include: Chicago, Detroit, New York, Newark, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. These urban communities had important Black populations, the highest number of members,

and considered extremely influential at various periods throughout the history of the Nation. The participant observation and study groups the researcher attended were with the reconstituted Nation of Islam under the leadership of Minister Louis Farrakhan. It is important to note that the original Nation of Islam no longer exists and the former NOI no longer engages in the recruitment efforts or instructional programs that were once popular prior to 1975. Therefore, in order to get a glimpse of how members were possibly recruited and the kind of information that was shared, the researcher attended the Nation of Islam meetings directed under Minister Louis Farrakhan in 2006 and 2007. I also visited former NOI mosques in Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, PA, Detroit, MI, and Oakland, CA, from 2006 to 2008.

Nation of Islam women left no memoirs or diaries. However, the researcher was able to collect copies of some correspondences, poetry, yearbooks, orientation manuals, cookbooks, flyers, newspaper articles that with close examination provide clear and coherent testimonies and expressions of women's experiences within the community. Many of these sources, such as the yearbooks, Muslim Cookbook, bulletins, and orientation manuals, have not been used by previous scholars who have written about Nation women. Therefore, this is the first study on the Nation of Islam women that utilizes cogent, primary documents from the Nation of Islam in addition to interviews.

This dissertation is unique for four additional key reasons: one, it represents the first examination of a range of Nation of Islam women who were important to the growth and development of the local and national Muslim

community. Two, it draws from primary documents that are inundated with evidence that women had a very clear, distinct, and often sought after voice in the advancement of the community. These written records allow Nation women to speak for themselves. Three, it provides the first systematic and detailed analyses of the Nation of Islam's multilevel educational programs which were intricately tied to the home. This initiative was important because it reflected and embodied an agenda of self-determination, race consciousness, engendered power, spirituality and politics intermingled in a focused, disciplined, and determined struggle to build thriving, safe, healthy, intelligent and successful Black families and by extension communities, most of which were directed and managed by women. The education program formulated a homebuilding initiative that both formalized and legitimized Black parenting and child rearing. Four, it provides the first global analysis of the Nation of Islam and the involvement of women in the international conversation during a time when women were often excluded from participation even in many of the local movements.

The remainder of this Chapter provides the captious details concerning the research sites, other important sources, not explored in detail in the historiography.

Based upon a critical analysis of primary and secondary documents as well as interviews with former members of the Nation, both men and women, this dissertation acknowledges the experiences of women in one of America's largest Black sociopolitical and religious movements. This study contributes to the

developing scholarship on the Nation of Islam in general and the growing Black community of Muslims in particular. Women in the Nation spoke “with many voices . . . expressing many individual opinions . . . and were unanimous in their insistence that their own emancipation could not be separated from the emancipation of their men. Their liberation was inextricably tied to the liberation of the race and the improvement of the life of the black community.”¹³ It is in the spirit of these words, that I will offer a historical account and critical examination of the contributions Black women made to the original Nation of Islam.

There have been a number of scholarly works completed on the Nation of Islam, yet that number does not equate to the impact and legacy of the group in American and African American history. Many of the primary documents from the community have either been lost, purposely destroyed or remain in private collections. Student records, report cards, and other Temple and school records appear to have been misplaced. Recent initiatives have been implemented since the beginning of this work in an effort to capture the work of the Nation of Islam and its economic, political, educational and spiritual impact since its origins. Such initiatives include *The New Africa Center* in Philadelphia, PA, a museum and archive dedicated to documenting the history of African American Muslims in the Americas, and the on-line *Muhammad Speaks* and other historical documents archive by *Nation of Islam's Women Committed to Preserving the Truth*. Additionally, the reconstituted Nation of Islam, of which several former followers of Elijah Muhammad belong, have recently been engaged in their own history project of collecting documents and encouraging adherents to write and record

their own stories to formally contribute to American written and oral annals.

Local and state archives have very limited sources outside of the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper, which is missing editions, and has consistently been underexplored in the secondary literature on the Nation. Public archives also have holdings of Nation publications from the mid-1960s that were massed produced like *Message to the Blackman in America* and recently published works on the reconstituted Nation. While the Nation of Islam was harassed and monitored throughout its long history by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) these records are many times bias, blacked out, redacted, and often of poor quality. Though there are a large number of long-term adherents of Elijah Muhammad who are still living (most between sixty and ninety years of age), the process of obtaining written consent posed a problem in securing interviews because many saw the consent form as intimidating and tedious.

Several newspapers and magazines from the late 1950s through the mid-1970s carried a number of exposes on the Nation, including *Time Magazine*, *Ebony Magazine*, *Jet Magazine*, the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Herald*, and *Chicago Defender*. The “Muslim school” was highlighted in at least one educational journal during the 1960s (*Phi Kappa Phi*). Christine Claybourne Johnson (also known as Sister Christine Muhammad) wrote the Nation’s first textbook titled *Muhammad’s Children: A first grade reader* in 1963. This reader is extremely extensive and includes readings from and about Carter G. Woodson, W.E.B. Du Bois, J.A. Rodgers, and distinguished Blacks abroad. The text discusses a range of topics, including “How Africans came to America,” Intra-

Black relations, a biography of Alexander Pushkin, and the history of University of Islam. Also published was *Our Nation, Reader and Coloring Book* produced by Muhammad's University of Islam in Oakland, California.

Other repositories offering a variation of sources concerning the original Nation of Islam include the *Coalition for the Remembrance of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad*, an archive that has a number of recorded sources dating back to 1956, including a NOI produced documentary outlining the history of the Nation from 1930 to 1975. In addition, special collections at various universities and local libraries had poetry, essays and other brief writings, such as the Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection at Temple University, the Robert W. Woodruff Library Special Collections at Clark Atlanta University, that house the C. Eric Lincoln papers, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign Special Collections, and the Vivian G Harsh Research Collection at the Carter G. Woodson library in Chicago most of which proved somewhat fruitful. The data concerning the Nation of Islam from the C. Eric Lincoln papers was woefully incomplete as many of his papers regarding the Nation were destroyed in a fire at his home before coming to the archives. Consequently, much of that invaluable work has been lost.

The secondary sources should be approached with some caution, as the great majority of works are one-dimensional, heavily male-centered, and at times perhaps even gender biased and inaccurate. Scholars who have written about the Nation of Islam have focused their efforts on the male followers, particularly their more militant contributions. Recently, several authors including Edward E.

Curtis, IV and Herbert Berg have turned their attention to more of the religious contributions of the group. C. Eric Lincoln's work, *The Black Muslims in America*, remains the premier manuscript on the Nation of Islam.¹⁴

Secondary literature that explores women in the Civil Rights-Black Power era generally leave out Nation women. If they are mentioned at all, Black Muslim women make only cameo appearances, like in the recent works of Betty Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin's *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, Austin Algermon's *Achieving Blackness: Race, Black Nationalism and Afrocentrism in the Twentieth Century* and Johnnetta Cole and Beverly Guy-Sheftall's *Gender Talk: The Struggle for Women's Equality in African American Communities*.¹⁵ These sources are mostly cyclical presenting much of the same tacit misogyny and patriarchy offered in most text written about the Nation. In nearly every instance the findings are supported little by research and exaggerated by conjecture. None of the published works to date offer a detailed analysis of Nation women, and very few pull from Nation documents alongside substantial women's narratives to support their claims. Every manuscript published on the Nation of Islam lacks primary sources by and about Nation of Islam women outside of glimpses of the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper culled prior to 1975. In the subsequent chapter, a detailed historiography of the secondary sources is further explored.

I offer a word here about unpublished works. Five theses/dissertations explore the experiences of Nation of Islam women ranging from 1960 to 1980. Although these texts provide a good source of information (some culled from

interviews with actual Nation women), they still lack the kind of sizeable sampling of primary sources that can provide a precise depiction of the rich spectrum of involvement and roles of the Nation's women during the era of Black consciousness. This dissertation is clearly distinct because it is the first work, published and unpublished, that duly amasses a wealth of primary documents that permit me to glean Black women experiences within the group.

The first dissertation was completed in 1976 by Jacqueline C. Pope and titled *The Status of Nation Women*. The next one, finished seventeen years later in 1994, was written by Cynthia S'Thembile West titled *Nation Builders: Female Activism in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1970*. Then in 1998 Randal Omar Ali wrote *The Foundation: Women in the Nation of Islam*, and in 1999 Ajile Aisha Amatullah-Rahman penned *She Stood by His Side and at Times in His Stead: The Life and Legacy of Sister Clara Muhammad, First Lady of the Nation of Islam*—this is the only biography on Clara Muhammad, the wife of Elijah Muhammad. The last of the five was *Portrait of a Woman: The Inaccurate Portrayal of Women in the Original Nation of Islam* by Katherine Currin, written in 2004.¹⁶ These attempts of cultivating an accurate depiction of women in the Nation were hindered by either lack of entrance into the group or dearth of cardinal sources *by* and *about* Nation women.

Pope's work focuses on the "change in status of women from 1965-1975."¹⁷ The author relies almost exclusively on articles taken from the *Bilalian News*, post-1975, and a few from *Muhammad Speaks*. Pope makes comparisons between women's status under Elijah Muhammad as oppose to W.D.

Muhammad, the leader of the original Nation community after 1975. Pope writes: "Since 1975 Sisters are permitted to be ministers . . . they do teach, lecture, write, and recruit other women."¹⁸ What Pope neglects to highlight is that women in the Nation were involved in these activities under Elijah Muhammad's leadership. Pope's views about the original NOI and the status of women within the group are aligned with many of the major scholars, expressing Islam as a religion that is oppressive to women. Pope inaccurately suggest that it was not until W.D. Muhammad's leadership that women in the Nation of Islam were able to actualize some sort of latent desire for "liberty" that prior to his directorship they were otherwise kept from exercising their liberty. Pope's study was limited by three things: first, it depended heavily on the *Bilalian News* and failed to include a deeper survey of *Muhammad Speaks*, the earlier incarnation of the NOI publication. A critical exploration of *Muhammad Speaks* could have provided a far more timely and accurate source for research of the period during Elijah Muhammad's leadership. Second, she failed to interview women from the NOI citing the prospective interview participants as "non-committal"; and third she relied almost exclusively on mostly male narratives for information about women experiences.¹⁹

West actually offers some of the best work on the NOI women. Her study explores women's activism in the Nation from 1960 until 1970. The work is noteworthy and unique because of the Afrocentric approach she uses in exploring Nation women's roles. West adequately places NOI women on "a continuum of African American females in action to change the life conditions for

. . . African Americans.”²⁰ West, unlike Pope, is able to conduct a number of interviews of women who were formerly in the NOI prior to 1975. Moreover, West cements her study in one NOI community that she believes is representative of the majority of Muslims living in urban areas. West’s subjects are Black women from Newark New Jersey who she argues ascribed to a kind of Africana Womanism. Consequently, she “explores how the activists work of Black Muslim women, alone and in partnership with men, helped to empower themselves and the Black community.”²¹

West’s project is refreshing compared to earlier works completed on the NOI, and is the only work both major and minor to use an African-centered approach. She also provides an overview of the history of the organization and its community programs, and immediately addresses the shortcomings of previous scholarship on the NOI. West writes, “a gender based perception of the African American struggle, demonstrated in the paucity of records of Black women in action for justice, has obscured the contributions made by women in the NOI.”²² Significantly, she attacks narrow ideas concerning both Islam and domesticity, which West argues obstructs our ability to understand NOI women and the importance of their work. Instead, she contends one must utilize a different lens in viewing domesticity as it concerns Nation women. She asserts:

Women in the home as nurturers, mothers/teachers, provides the infrastructure for the consistent transmission of values that direct interpersonal relationships . . . Black women . . . help shape consciousness in the formative years of children’s lives, and thereby, make important and ongoing contributions, which sustain the social fabric of the Black community
Reevaluating how we look at women’s work . . . will contribute to a new understanding of the role of women.²³

West insists that women throughout African American history have played complementary roles to men. West provides examples of women outside of the NOI to illustrate this point. She highlights other influential women like Joann Gibson Robinson, Septima Pionsette Clark, Angela Davis, Nannie Helen Burroughs and Mary McCloud Bethune and women in the Black church as representative of the “unwavering attention that Black women have given to the struggle for African American liberation since . . . enslavement.”²⁴ Likewise, she challenges the common assessment that the proviso to protect Black Muslim women in the NOI “automatically implies subordination.”²⁵ West posits, “when the messenger demanded praise and honor for Black womanhood, an essential step was taken in the eradication of sexist myths and stereotyped images about Black women.”²⁶ Her critique of the M.G.T. was also very different than any other work. West covers a great deal of the areas of perceived contention surrounding the roles of NOI women such as dress, nutrition, hygiene, business and protection. At every step, West re-centers NOI women and contradicts popular held notions about each of these topics. Lastly, West draws from the Quran as she explores gender dynamics within the Nation and provides a great deal of women’s voices within the text.

Even with such an impressive work, the major shortcomings of West’s study are: one, it begins in 1960, almost thirty years after the NOI’s inception; two, she does not pinpoint any women specifically in the NOI who held prominent leadership positions, thus leaving the heroines and activists of the community nameless and invisible; three, the women interviewed did not have very long

tenures in the NOI; and four, her over examination of other women outside the community, who she distinguishes as “enslaved black women and black Baptist women,” in place of NOI women actually weakens her argument about the importance of women within the Nation of Islam.²⁷

Currin, like West, offers another insightful view of Nation women. She attempts to deconstruct much of the myths surrounding NOI women as well, although her efforts are not as methodical as West’s work. Currin, like previous scholars, also uses interviews to help authenticate her project. Her subjects included women who joined the NOI as late as the 1970s and at least one who joined as early as the 1950s. Currin, unlike West, interviewed women who came from many different places, and thus could pull on a diverse set of experiences within the NOI. While Currin dialogued with a smaller number of women than West, and almost all of the women Currin interviewed worked outside the home in a professional capacity during their tenure in the NOI, all of these women are still practicing Muslims, although they belong to dispersed Islamic communities. Currin also garnered some information from the NOI newspaper, *Muhammad Speaks*, along with various secondary sources.

Currin’s assessment of Nation of Islam is essentially women were not oppressed because they did not allow themselves to be subjugated—this seems to suggest that Muslim men collectively attempted to oppress them, but were otherwise thwarted in their efforts. She highlights that while Elijah Muhammad issued ‘mandates’ that she and the women she interviewed found oppressive, Currin argues these Nation women did not follow any of the rules with which they

were uncomfortable. She asserted, “women still found ways to maintain authority in their lives while participating in the Nation. Sister Ruth (Currin’s informant) was very opposed to the idea of women being controlled . . . [therefore] she spoke out against policies of the Nation of Islam.”²⁸ Currin also pointed out that the Muslim women found many benefits to belonging to the Nation—accordingly she argues that most of the women interviewed found the Muslim Girls Training (M.G.T.) teachings useful for their everyday lives even after leaving the NOI. Currin contends: “all the women interviewed expressed over and over again that they loved their experiences in the Nation of Islam, precisely because it taught them that they could accomplish what they will.”²⁹ However, even in light of this seemingly laudatory conclusion, Currin argues that Elijah Muhammad wanted to control and therefore oppress women, maintaining that “he [Elijah Muhammad] assumed that women should not possess the right to choose where and when they would like to go.”³⁰

Currin’s project was unquestionably limited because she conducted only six interviews; her race (white) may have had a bearing on her interpretation and analysis, an issue she openly acknowledges herself. Moreover, Currin limits the analysis by predetermining the most important aspects of women’s lives in the NOI in confining her inquiry to race, birth control, domestic duties and employment. Like West and Pope, her work is extremely important to the historiography of the NOI, especially concerning women, but much like Pope and the other scholars, she fails to secure and conduct a thorough exploration of primary documents that may better illuminate Nation women’s diverse

experiences. Ali's work, like West, was a local study. She explored the Black women in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, who joined the Nation in the 1960s. Again, women's voices from interviews are used to create a tapestry by which we can see the success and power of the community and women's involvement within it. Finally, Amatullah-Rahman's research is unique and remains unmatched for it provides the first detailed examination of the first lady of the NOI, Clara Muhammad. All five works I have outlined here address the importance of Nation of Islam women in varying degrees.

"A Nation Can Rise No Higher Than It's Women: The Critical Role of Black Muslim Women in the Development and Purveyance of Black Consciousness, 1945-1975," significantly advances the aforementioned scholarship on the Nation of Islam by synthesizing the interviews available in various works, such as Ali and West, on the Nation in tandem with my own interviews and primary Nation sources.

At the completion of this research, at least three of the interviewees, all women, were in the process of writing their own books concerning their experiences in the Nation of Islam. It is my hope that as more NOI members come to understand the importance of leaving records and keeping these papers, memoirs and other documents in a secure space, one day a more complete and accurate history of the Nation of Islam may be compiled.

Location of Researcher

I am not a member of the original Nation of Islam nor do I know if I was ever considered as such. Yet, when I first began this study, I initially located

myself as an outsider with insider privileges. However, as I have come full circle in completing this dissertation, I now position myself as both an insider and outsider in tandem. I was born into the Nation of Islam, and hence by birthright I could be considered an insider by association. Both my parents were members of the original Nation, and my father held a key position, Delaware Valley Regional Secretary. As such, I am privy to some inside information and contacts, mainly my father. Yet, this did not always prove helpful in my search for primary documents and interviewees for my research.

During the early stages of my dissertation, I sent several letters to various individuals and heads of mosques and temples in a number of major cities with historic and strong NOI communities, like Detroit and Chicago. I followed up by calling those same mosque and temples, but received no reply from the majority of my initial contacts, except from Detroit, Mosque No. 1, and the London Mosque in England, each associated with the Nation of Islam under Louis Farrakhan. To my further dismay, although told they would permit me to solicit and interview members of the Detroit mosque, I never heard back from the Secretary of Protocol who was to give me final confirmation and contacts. For over a year, I attempted to gain entrance with no success outside of attending the Sunday meetings and study groups, which are open to the general public. Again, the focus of my study at that point was very different as I was looking to explore the evolution of NOI women from its inception to present. I did proceed with interviews and research in London, England but later decided not to include those sources in this dissertation because of changing the historical period and

initial focus of my inquiry. Still, I began to conclude that perhaps I was not viewed as a true insider as I was unable to leverage my own status as a daughter of a member of the original Nation community from Philadelphia to successfully gain access.

Upon further reflection, I began to see that because my socialization and experiences were a blend of the original Nation at its decline and so-called orthodox Islam, I would at times continue to experience my research as an outsider, manifested most obviously, when I encountered difficulty-gaining admission into somewhat closed communities of which I was only briefly a part and initially securing primary documents. My father proved to be a vital source, which most outsiders need to gain access when completing a research project on a semi-closed community. Although he was able to help secure some of the initial research participants it was with the assistance of other informants that I garnered the great majority of contributors. The Muslim community is comprised of both the original Nation of Islam and the so-called orthodox Islam under the leadership of Imam W. D. Muhammad, son of Clara and Elijah Muhammad, and leader of the Nation of Islam as of February 1975. As such, my access to and familiarity with the points of entry into communities comprised almost entirely of members from the pre-1975 NOI was limited.

Ironically, my first interviewee came through a referral by a professor at Michigan State University with whom I had discussed my initial project. Although not a Muslim, this professor was able to put me in touch with a former student who he was certain had been a part of the Nation of Islam during the tenure of

Clara and Elijah Muhammad. I quickly contacted him and discovered his mother had been an active member in the early 1970s. After explaining my project to her she became my first research participant. But soon after this first interview, I again was stalled in securing many more for nearly a year—although I received word that other long time members of the NOI were interested in sitting with me to discuss their time in the Nation—including the then current leader of the original Nation of Islam community, the late Imam W.D. Muhammad. Yet, it took an entire year before these interviews began to materialize.

Despite these initial setbacks, over the course of next three years I was able to complete a significant number of both formal and informal interviews, a process accelerated by the assistance of my father, who I solicited after my initial efforts had stalled—a poignant example of my insider-outsider status. In fact, my father was integral in finally securing the interview with Imam W.D. Muhammad. Another important source proved to be vital in securing other participants was the founder of the New Africa Center a Muslim repository in Philadelphia. From 2006 to 2008, I amassed thirty interviews, 12 men and 18 women. The age ranges of participants were between 46 to 78 years old. Some interviewees were college educated, while others were not. A few were from middle class and working class backgrounds, while others were from very poor socioeconomic backgrounds. Most women worked outside the home either within or outside the NOI community. Notwithstanding the difficulty in securing actual interviews, the dialogues typically went very well once the actual conversation was underway. While many participants expressed firm constraints on their time, and had initially

agreed to only an hour interview, every research participant willingly set for 2-4 hours once the discussion began.

However, after the research moved past the initial challenge of convening interviews, another hurdle arose: the problem of collecting documentation. Many of the primary documents supporting the experiences recounted in interviews were still held by the individual members—coaxing these long time members into allowing me to see even a few of these documents, including members from my own family, proved a tough and ongoing issue throughout this research, at least at first. The opening of a new museum—*The New Africa Center*—gave me the opportunity to view some donated documents that had not yet been displayed to the general public. Again, the founder of this center was also responsible for locating a number of the interviewees who participated in this project, and I was even able to hold one group interview at this location with his encouragement and assistance.

Members of the NOI community who finally assented to be interviewed, both men and women, appeared at first uneasy about discussing their experiences in the Nation (some postponed the interview several times, including Imam W.D. Muhammad). The tacit uneasiness felt by these individuals could have been the result of their own insecurities about the relative tenor or their perceived unimportance of their particular stories and/or positions of power and influence in the community. Perhaps more than anything else was the heightened sense of mistrust of unknowns, which I certainly was from most of their perspectives. This was fueled through the years by the well known presence

of an overwhelming number of saboteurs, traitors, FBI and other policing agents who infiltrated the Nation throughout its history. It was in these moments that I most felt like an outsider. During the interview processes some of the participants talked about federal agents threatening their families and using other means of intimidation to get them to leave the Nation and become informants. This same historical anxiety is heightened during this post 9-11 era as Muslims worry about being aligned with terrorists—many interviewees were initially leery of being audio-taped for fear their words might possibly be used against them as current and former followers of the Nation of Islam. I believe it is this same concern that lead to the possible destruction of many of the primary documents of this quasi-clandestine group.

Still another level of caution emerged as a direct result of distrust of previous scholars. Several prospective participants were very wary and expressed serious concerns about dealing with academic researchers. On a number of occasions, contributors shared their candid and sad stories of how they had previously given valued documents and emotional interviews to other researchers and yet never heard from them again. This prompted me to send periodic updates on the status of my work to all research participants, even those in London, England.

Between the summer and winter of 2007, my work started to progress taking off in December 2007. I secured and interviewed more research participants, and actually found a primary resource outside of the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper that was by and about Muslim women. Finally, by summer

2008, women and men I had interviewed in the fall of 2007 and early on in the spring semester of 2008 told me they had looked through their belongings and located some items I may be interested in using for my research. I should note that these research participants did not follow up and contact me voluntarily. Again, this constant appeal for primary documents was directly related to my outsider status. With this in mind, I endeavored to be highly sensitive to research participants and sent periodic letters to everyone, letting them know where I was in the process and reminding them that if they came across any documents, or had additional things they wanted to share, to please contact me. Still, very few did, however I took the initiative to reach out directly to follow up with them. When I did this I got a positive response. There were no contributors who could aid me in garnering the primary documents from individuals which I eventually examined. It was my determination and work to build trust with the research participants that enabled me to secure such rich resources. I also believe that the surveys I conducted as I was finishing up interviews helped me acquire invaluable contacts and information—responses to the surveys often led to additional names for research participants and additional historical artifacts. This approach yielded primary sources for me that previous scholars had not before utilized.

Although some were eager and willing after some time, most research participants declined to turn over certain primary documents to me despite my exhortations, and some honestly said they had lost or misplaced their documents as a result of transient living conditions and the raids on many of the mosque by

law enforcement during the height of the era of black consciousness. While a cursory observation of these participants' ultimate unwillingness to acquiesce to my requests might seem to implicate what Darlene Clark Hine calls a "culture of dissemblance" the above discussion makes it clear that it is the cumulative effect of the above factors that served as the most powerful deterrent.³¹ When engaged in conversation, the Muslim women interviewed as a part of this study freely recounted their experiences, pulling out photo albums, individual pictures, clothes and other materials to share with the researcher.

During the groundwork activities, I went above and beyond "the call of duty" to ensure my methods were sensitive, ethical and beyond reproach. For example, I accommodated every instance where I was asked to either turn off the tape, most frequently by those who are members of the reconstituted Nation, or go "off the record," typically when the interviewee felt the information they shared was either not germane to the wider Muslim community or involved highly sensitive matters they did not want disclosed to their children. Even still, in the vast majority of the interviews conducted, I was not limited in what I could or could not disclose. I made effective, but respectful use of the aspects of my identity that allowed me to function as an insider—I was often able to get contact information from people who were actively involved in the community but who might have otherwise been unknown to purely outside researchers.³² Even in instances that included individuals I knew would be critical to the research, yet to whom I had no direct line, I had and developed intrapersonal resources on which I could draw to lend assistance.

Because of my young age during my time in the Nation, my memories held few solid answers, beyond an intuitive impression of significance and importance, as to the critical role women played in the development of the Nation. Yet growing up I vividly recall Nation women, particularly my mother, and the grace, power and strength they embodied as they went about their work. These memories and others propelled my desire to learn more about the history of the historic Muslim school I attended in Philadelphia and the people, especially women, who made it possible for me to have such a rich and rewarding educational experience. Today, even as I observe, most often from afar, the women who are members of the reconstituted Nation of Islam, they nonetheless still seem to embody the same attributes of strength, power and nobility as the Muslim women who came before them in the original Nation. Watching them, I have gained a strong curiosity, need, and even a responsibility to know and document their history . . . our history.

This work is certainly important as it not only reveals a heretofore unacknowledged agency of previously invisible and nameless Muslim women from 1945 to 1975, as demonstrated in both their private roles as mothers and wives, and their visible public roles as leaders, instructors and business owners, but it also seismically shifts the landscape across which previous scholarship has asked us to view gender as it concerns the oldest and largest Black Muslim community within the United States. From a very close and critical reading of Nation member's narratives and documents I realized these women, as discussed in *Race Rebels* by Robin Kelley, had employed "every day acts of

resistance” during their tenure in the community.³³ They did this through their dress, diet, education, and private and public works.

NOTES

¹ The phrase Original Nation of Islam first used in an unpublished work by Jacqueline Pope, "The Status of Nation Women" (MA Thesis, Queens College, 1976); Clenora Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* (Troy: Bedford Publishers, 2004); Sonya Andrmahr, Terry Lovell and Carol Wolkwitz, *A Concise Glossary of Feminist Theory* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 211; Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought, Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1991); See discussion on the "Second Reconstruction" in Marable, *Race, Reform and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1982*.

² Joyce Ladner, *Tomorrow's Tomorrow: The Black Woman* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 25.

³ Nancy Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," in *Discovering Reality, Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, eds. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka (Boston: D. Riedel Publishing Company, 1983), 283-310; Hudson-Weems, "Africana Womanism and the Critical Need for Africana Theory and Thought," *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 21 no. 2 (1997): 83.

⁴ Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanism, Reclaiming Ourselves*, 23; Nah Dove, "African Womanism: An Afrocentric Theory," *Journal of Black Studies* 28 no. 5 (1998): 534.

⁵ Molefi Kete Asante, "The Resurgence of the African World in the 21st Century," in *Africa in the 21st Century*, ed. Ama Mazama (New York: Routledge, 2007), 7.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Corrective according to Marable is to "challenge and critique the racist stereotypes that have dominated the mainstream discourse of Euro-American academic institutions . . . It has challenged Eurocentric notions of aesthetics and beauty, which all too often are grounded in an implied or even explicit contempt for the standards of blackness." My idea of corrective goes beyond Marable's racialized definition. Corrective as examined in this study includes challenging one-dimensional interpretations of Black phenomena that is possibly not only based on racial stereotypes but also may include religious, gender, cultural and class stereotypes and misinterpretations; Marable, "Who Stole Black Studies? Reclaiming the African American Intellectual Tradition," *Race & Reason* 4 (1997): 3.

⁹ Cheryl Townsend Gilkes and Deborah Gray White's works on Black women's activism provide excellent models to help explore the experiences of Black Muslim women who joined the Nation of Islam. Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, *"If It Wasn't for the Women . . ." Black Women's Experience and the Womanist Culture in Church and Community* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001); Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999); Harry F. Wolcott, "Making a Study 'More Ethnographic,'" in *Representation in Ethnography* ed. John Van Maanen (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 79-111.

¹⁰ Fontana and James H. Frey, "Interviewing, The Art of Science," in *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*, eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonne S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 361-376.

¹¹ This is an annual convention which replaced *Saviour's Day* after 1975. It went through several evolutions after 1975 in an effort to re-identify the group. See *Bilalian Newspaper* 1976.

¹² Although a more lengthy discussion concerning original and reconstituted occurs in the introduction chapter. The reconstituted Nation refers to adherents of Farrakhan after 1975 and the original NOI concerns Clara and Elijah Muhammad's followers.

¹³ Gerda Lerner, ed., *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), xxv.

¹⁴ Lincoln, *Black Muslims in America*.

¹⁵ According to Gilkes, White and other scholars during the 1950s and 1960s Black women were generally and deliberately relegated to lower statuses in many civil rights and black power organizations. For more on Black women experiences in Civil Rights and Black Power movements see Jo Ann Gibson Robinson and David J. Garrow, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987); Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story*; Angela Davis, *Angela Y. Davis: An Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers, 1989); Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin, eds. *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movements* (New York: NYU Press, 2001); Austin Algernon, *Achieving Blackness: Race, Black Nationalism, and Afrocentrism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Johnnetta Betsch Cole and Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Gender Talk, The Struggle for Women's Equality in African American Communities* (New York: Ballentine Books, 2003).

¹⁶ Pope, "The Status of Nation Women"; Cynthia S'Themble West, "Nation Builders: Female Activism in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1970" (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1994); Randal Omar Ali, "The Foundation: Women in the Nation of Islam" (MA Thesis, University of Iowa, 1998); Ajile Aisha Amatullah Rahman, "She Stood by His Side and at Times in His Stead: The Life and Legacy of Sister Clara Muhammad, First Lady of the Nation of Islam" (DA. diss., Clark Atlanta University, 2001); Katherine Currin, "Portrait of a Woman: The Inaccurate Portrayal of Women in the Original Nation of Islam" (Honors Essay. University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, 2004).

¹⁷ Pope, "The Status of Nation Women," 6.

¹⁸ Ibid, 13.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ West, "Nation Builders: Female Activism in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1970," iv.

²¹ Ibid, 6.

²² Ibid, 7.

²³ Ibid, 17.

²⁴ Ibid, 33.

²⁵ Ibid, 104.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, 36.

²⁹ Ibid, 34.

³⁰ Ibid, 35.

³¹ "Culture of Dissemblance" as defined by Darlene Clark Hine., The cult of secrecy or invisibility was not apparent with the women I interviewed. Initially, I thought their reluctance to go on record or when I was asked not to use certain information may constitute this ideology but with further research and numerous conversations I found this was not the case with the Nation women I interviewed. Darlene Clark Hine, *Hinesight: Black Women and the Re-construction of American History* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1997), 41-43.

³² Both Pope and Currin candidly discuss their failures in securing a significant number of interviews with Nation women. Other scholars such as historian Andrew Claude Clegg also had great difficulty securing interviews particularly with W.D. Muhammad and other long-term followers. I met with Dr. Clegg summer 2006 to discuss the preliminary work I was doing on the topic. See Clegg's discussion on difficulty securing sources in Andrew Claude Clegg, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad*, 285-287; Nwando Achebe offers a discussion on the "location of the researcher" and considers herself "at the crossroads of two different worlds." She writes, "a researcher's location in relationship to her work is very crucial." Nwando Achebe, *Farmers, Warriors, and Kings: Female Power and Authority in Northern Igboland, 1900-1960* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005), 2. Gerda Lerner also offers a brief discussion on this idea of outside/inside status. She grapples with the idea of being an American yet at the same time experiencing an "otherness" that she argued set her apart and at times placed her outside of what it meant to be an American and a Jew. She discussed her struggle with coming to terms with balancing an insider/outsider status throughout her life as a Jew, American, German and

academic. Gerda Lerner, *Why History Matters: Life and Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 12.

³³ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 32-33.

Chapter 2

“To Gain A Place In the Sun” The Historiography of the Original Nation of Islam

The single most powerful Black man in this country died today . . . The Messenger made the message very clear. He turned alienation into emancipation. He concentrated on taking the slums out of the people and the people out of the slums. He took dope out of veins and put hope in our brains. He was the father of black consciousness. His leadership extended far beyond the membership of the Black Muslims. For more than three decades, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad has been the spiritual leader of the Black Muslims and a progressive force for Black identity and consciousness, self-determination and economic development.”

--Rev Jesse Jackson
Operation PUSH¹

The Nation of Islam developed into a vital and positive force within many communities and has provided answers and services for thousands and thousands of people.

--Vernon E. Jordan
Executive Director,
National Urban League²

Under the leadership of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, the Nation of Islam represented the largest and most preeminent Muslim community in United States history. Originating in Detroit, Michigan, in the 1930s, the Nation of Islam significantly aided in the growth and institutionalization of Islam in the Americas generally, and the development and reconstruction of the larger Black community specifically.³ Several of the group's greatest contributions in the latter area are most evident in the creation of independent Black institutions, drug rehabilitation, prison and social reform.⁴ The Nation of Islam encouraged alternative religious practices among Black Americans who had previously, and nearly uniformly, focused on the traditions of Christianity. It has also generated unique

opportunities for extensive research in Black theology, education, political science, economics, psychology, and history. Unquestionably, the Nation of Islam members were the most significant advocates of Islam in America in the mid to late 20th century, yet as a group they continue to be under-explored; in contrast to an overrepresentation of scholarship on their Arab/Middle Eastern counterparts over the last ten years, especially concerning women. Historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. asserts that “[Elijah] Muhammad’s movement is unique in that it has thrived outside the Christian tradition and the Protestant community;” while even Garvey’s movement was unabashedly Christian and, therefore, far more palatable.⁵

Between 1938 and 2008, scholars of diverse disciplines have written a total of eighteen books, a host of articles and over fifty dissertations and master theses that give serious attention to the original Nation of Islam. Of the eighteen manuscripts, only one, an autobiography, specifically acknowledges the experiences of Nation of Islam women. Among the dissertations, five distinctly examine the perspective of women in the Nation.⁶ Given the dearth of critical writings on Nation women in the historical record, it would seem that scholars think these women are inconsequential and unworthy of rigorous academic inquiry. This glaring oversight may perhaps exist for several reasons: one, until very recently, Islam has been seen as a minority religion in the United States; two, Islam is typically associated with Arab culture, and is therefore often seen as a foreign and ancillary phenomenon; three, there is a deep ignorance among scholars about who is who in the Black Muslim community, as there are a variety

of Islamic groups outside of the NOI; four, the NOI was an aggressive, outspoken, some may argue hate mongering, and self-determinist group who may continue to be viewed as a pariah community by many because of their unapologetic views about Christianity, Jews, white people, and accommodating Black people.⁷ Perhaps to further explicate their omission by scholars we may turn to C. Eric Lincoln who maintained "Black Muslims are embarrassing to both white and the Negro communities: they call attention to a situation so irrational and so ugly that neither side wants to face it squarely. It is, therefore, only to be expected that many people wish the Muslims would simply fold their tents and go away, and that they will try to hex them away by refusing to admit that they really exist."⁸

Important to mention, though briefly, are the manuscripts authored by the Nation of Islam as they are used by several scholars to elucidate the group's philosophy concerning women. In 1965, the first Nation of Islam publication, made available to the wider Black community, was authored by Elijah Muhammad titled *Message to the Blackman in America*. During most of Nation history, it was common practice that only registered members of the group receive detailed written teachings from Fard and Elijah Muhammad. Yet, despite this policy, *Message to the Blackman in America* was published for wide distribution and consumption, marking a shift in this approach and paving the way for other Nation manuscripts between 1965 and 1975. The next four full-length texts outlining Nation of Islam philosophy include: *How to Eat to Live*, 1967; *How to Eat to Live, Part II*, 1972; *The Fall of America*, 1973; and the final

book, *Our Saviour Has Arrived*, 1974. These texts made a significant portion of the Nation's doctrine available to the wider public and therefore strengthened their influence. There were no manuscripts authored by other Nation members during Clara and Elijah Muhammad's leadership, with the notable exception of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, authored by Alex Haley, released after Malcolm's death in 1965.⁹ Supplementary writings containing collections of Muhammad's writings, speeches and interviews were made available to the public after Elijah Muhammad's passing in 1975.¹⁰

The historiography I analyze in the remainder of this chapter chronologically surveys the major secondary scholarship completed and focused exclusively on the original Nation of Islam from the late 1930s up to the 2000s. I specifically explore the sources utilized by scholars, and the ways each author or excludes the experiences of Nation of Islam women within these texts. Erudite manuscripts that solely investigate Nation of Islam women are nonexistent.

The remaining portion of this dissertation chapter is comprised of four parts, arranged according to the phases of the scholarship published on the Nation of Islam. The first phase probes the books written on the original Nation of Islam prior to Elijah Muhammad's death. The second segment considers the literature published between 1975 and the mid-1980s. The third provides a critique of writings on the Nation published from the 1990s to 2000s. The fourth part examines autobiographical and laconic writings where authors position women of the Nation of Islam at the center of their analyses.

Scholarship on the Nation of Islam, 1930-1975

In 1938, Erdmann D. Beynon, a social scientist, authored the first extensive study completed on the emerging Nation of Islam. Beynon's prior research had mostly concerned migration patterns of Hungarian peasants, and marginalized racial groups within Hungary. How he became interested in the Nation of Islam is unclear, but he lived in the area of the first Temple in Detroit, Michigan, and likely observed the beginnings of the community and the Black people who came to comprise the group. For a short time, Beynon taught at the University of Michigan, yet soon left the academy to do community work within the Flint Community Association.¹¹ In his assessment of the Nation of Islam or what he called "Temple people," Beynon described the early Nation as a "cult," belonging to "a chain of movements arising out of a growing disillusionment and race consciousness of recent Negro migrants to northern industrial cities."¹² Despite such value-laden language, he clearly recognized the potential importance of this movement and the dramatic effect on the poor and migrant Black communities in Detroit and Chicago. According to Beynon, "those who accepted . . . [the] teaching [of the Nation] became new men and women . . . restored to their original and true selves."¹³

Beynon conducted research on the community during its early development providing the first intimate look at the group by collecting first-hand accounts of over two hundred adherents. To date, Beynon collected the most sizeable sample of participants. In addition to interviews, he used law enforcement records, Nation of Islam documents, and newspaper articles to

support his work.¹⁴ Law enforcement records may provide some significant information about the group but should be approached with great caution as groups typically seen as cults or subversive are treated as hostile to American democratic values and depicted accordingly. Beynon's use of the primary source *Secret Rituals of the Nation of Islam* most likely proved important in critically exploring the group's philosophical underpinnings. He maintained there were only a few copies of the text but most lessons generally passed on orally from member to member. Also cited were several of the Nation's lessons which every man and woman is given upon entrance to the community. Outside of this text there are no other sources mentioned that could have helped to illuminate the everyday practices of the members of the group. The bulk of the study addressed the origins of the movement and its leaders; background and demographics of the members and their practices; the religious dogma and teachings; the increasing antagonistic relationship between the NOI members and law enforcement; and early divisions within the group.¹⁵

Unlike later scholars, Beynon proposed that the influences of Noble Drew Ali and Marcus Garvey on the Nation of Islam were minimal at best. He argued: "practically none of [the Nation of Islam members] . . . had been in the North prior to the collapse of the Marcus Garvey movement [and only] a few of them had come under the influence of the Moorish-American cult which succeeded it."¹⁶ Observing the socioeconomic circumstances of Nation members, Beynon described a relatively bleak picture of the conditions Blacks were living under in the early 1930s, during the height of the depression. Specifically, he highlights

the socio-political issues that overwhelmed the urban Black community such as overdependence on welfare, excessively high unemployment, poor diet, and bad health---all of which became serious areas of reform for the NOI. As a result, Nation women and men are trained and encouraged to set about "attacking all forms of dependence upon Whites."¹⁷

With regard to women, Beynon makes the case that Nation women were extremely significant in the establishment of the group in Detroit, being the first of those who encountered and welcomed the religious teacher, W. D. Fard Muhammad into their homes, clearly recognizing their agency.¹⁸ It is unclear why Beynon did not go any further with his research given the sects growing significance. Although he offers a critical evaluation of the early Nation, his assessments are extremely pithy particularly concerning women. This is surprising given the fact that he conducted two hundred interviews. Unfortunately, Beynon's research on the Nation did not result in any additional published scholarly writings until almost twenty-three years later. Though the Nation of Islam was briefly mentioned in Arthur H. Fauset's *Black Gods of the Metropolis* in 1944 and Arna Bontemps and Jack Conroy's *They See A City* in 1945, the next critical work that extensively examined the original Nation of Islam was not published until 1961.¹⁹ This groundbreaking text is typically credited to C. Eric Lincoln who wrote the first book length study on the group titled *The Black Muslims in America*.²⁰ Whatever the reasons for this gap in Nation scholarship, C. Eric Lincoln's writings picked up where Beynon's left off.

A highly recognized and comprehensive work, Lincoln's text was first written as a dissertation. He completed his research over a four-year period, interviewing Black Muslims actively involved in what he viewed as an organization. As a participant-observer he attended temple functions and national events. Most widely known for coining the term "Black Muslim," Lincoln's manuscript was highly touted, and popularized, by the media. The expression itself, "Black Muslim," is extremely telling and seem to suggest a conundrum for many of its detractors since up to the arrival of the Nation of Islam in 1930s, the great majority of Black people in the United States were actively practicing Christianity.²¹ The Nation represented the first major religious convergence by a non-immigrant community in U.S. history, marked by significant numbers of Black people collectively discarding the religion, Christianity, initially imposed upon their enslaved ancestors by white slave masters centuries prior.²²

Lincoln's pioneering work addressed six significant areas: the origins of the Nation; the legacy of Black Nationalism; the kinds of people who joined and stayed in the movement; the significance of their membership; the group's most salient goals; and their growing economic and political power. Indeed the uniqueness of the Nation of Islam enabled Lincoln to quickly become a sought after and noted scholar. Lincoln was a poet and novelists, and to many he was "considered the dean of black religious studies in the contemporary era."²³ He authored over 20 publications including books, edited volumes, and conference papers.²⁴ Ironically, Lincoln, a sociologist, offers a cursory analysis of the Nation of Islam, describing it as a 'social experience', while paying only slight attention

to the community's religious, educational, cultural or political orientations. Arguably, Lincoln's strong affiliation with the church shaped his 'doubts' as to the importance of religion to the group, and undoubtedly impacted his explication of the Nation.²⁵ He depicted the community as a "rapidly growing Chicago-centered movement," and suggested the only reasons why such a group might develop was a direct result of the racial attitudes of whites in America.²⁶ Lincoln described the Nation as a peaceful, disciplined and a powerful "social protest that moves upon a religious vehicle."²⁷ He also asserted that, "the media [describes] it [as] a terrorists organization built on the eventual eruption of violence . . . Police maintain constant alerts . . . and the leaders of the sect are under constant surveillance by the FBI."²⁸ Explored, although briefly, is the rising global significance of the group.²⁹ Despite the close scrutiny and ongoing harassment by law enforcement authorities and other critics Lincoln observed a well functioning, successful and in his estimation small but growing community.

Lincoln used a wealth of sources to make his case including major newspaper articles and magazines. The primary and most vital sources he employs included the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper, several speeches by Malcolm X and Louis X, *The Supreme Wisdom*, a text that outlines some of the group's doctrine, and interviews he conducted with members. Unfortunately, Lincoln only highlights the conversations with the men and we receive no mention of any women he solicited for information about the group. Although Lincoln appears to have successfully infiltrated the mosque, by being allowed to gather information, peruse the *Supreme Wisdom*, usually only given to members,

and interview figures like Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, and Louis Farrakhan, there is no utilization of additional documentation produced by the group or conversations with women. It is unclear given his full run of the community why he was unable to secure additional firsthand texts or pursue women's contributions.

Concerning women, Lincoln offered only a miniscule description. He explained that in the community "there is a strong emphasis on the equality of individuals irrespective of sex . . . [where] each sex is assigned a role considered proper to itself."³⁰ Though it seems important to emphasize the gender equality that existed within the group, his study nonetheless lacks a critical analysis of women's functions and their contributions to the growth and development of the Nation. Examples of women involved in leadership are blatantly absent from the narrative. Lincoln's only reference to women in any leadership capacity quickly associates them with men of some prominence. He argued, that perhaps the most "important woman in the sect is Lottie X of Chicago," who is head of the Muslim Girls Training Class (MGT), and the counterpart of Raymond Sharieff.³¹ Lincoln also asserted, "while equal in every way to their husbands, they [women] are taught to obey them. Modesty, thrift, and service are their chief concern."³² Though Lincoln claims that, "women were equal to their husbands in every way" he fails to offer an explanation for this assertion or how this equality is manifested in the community, leaving room for considerable speculation. He also suggested that the woman's main concerns were "thrift, service, and modesty," but he writes as if these concerns only pertained to women. If, as Lincoln asserts, women were

equal to their husbands and, by extension other Nation men “in every way,” why did he use the word “obey” at the end of this statement? This act of “obeying” appears to go against Nation of Islam doctrine, which clearly advises a Muslim only to obey Allah, God, and his messenger.³³ Lincoln’s use of “obey” seems more aligned with Christian gendered conventions. Lincoln also proposed that Lottie X was the most noteworthy woman of the group, but he presents no reason or support for this argument; is Lincoln alleging that no other women were important throughout the entire community or that Lottie X’s contribution or position is marginal. At least implicitly, Lincoln contends that women play significant roles in the Nation, however, the reader is provided with little that might substantiate the matter. Instead, Lincoln posited that, “women are especially enjoined not to imitate the silly and often immoral habits of the white woman, which can only wreck their marriages and their children”³⁴ It is clear from Nation doctrine that the Nation adherents found white women’s behaviors deplorable and a standard Black women should be cautious if not leery of embracing. Outside of these nominal statements, Lincoln does little to advance a nuanced analysis of the Nation of Islam in general or Nation women in particular. Finally, Lincoln described the membership of the group as “predominantly male.”³⁵ He maintained, “unlike the typical Christian church, the Muslim temples attract many more men than women, and men assume the full management of temple affairs. Women are honored, and they perform important functions within defined roles; they are not in any sense considered mere ‘property,’ as has sometimes been the case in classical Islam.”³⁶ Since Lincoln’s 1960 study, we

have discovered that the Nation was not a “predominantly male” group. Also, we have unearthed, contrary to what he initially argued, that women participated in the management of the Temple.³⁷ As he stated, and other scholars agree, women are treated well within the community and they are extremely important to the group.³⁸ However, Lincoln’s inability to further interrogate the gender dynamics of the group or include conversations with or writings from women systematically relegates women’s experiences to the fringes, thereby, setting a precedent for future scholars who would also continue to discount, ignore, underestimate, and narrowly construe the contributions of Nation women. Though most of his works were associated with the Black church, Lincoln is most well known for his scholarship on Nation of Islam.³⁹ Lincoln’s scholarship is unquestionably comprehensive and innovative given the time it was written, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, yet its shortcomings cannot be overlooked.

In 1962, one year after Lincoln’s work, E. U. Essien-Udom, a Nigerian political scientist, published his definitive manuscript on the Nation, titled *Black Nationalism: A Search For An Identity In America*. Like Lincoln, Essien-Udom used an ethnographic approach, utilizing interviews, participant observations, and other primary documents. Approaching the study with a much broader lens than his contemporary, Essien-Udom’s outsider status influenced his critiques of the Nation.⁴⁰ Unlike Lincoln, his focal point was Black Nationalism in the United States as it related not only to the Nation of Islam but also to other key nationalists groups. During the 1960s, Black Nationalism picked up new

momentum not only in the United States but also throughout Africa. In his work, Essien-Udom “describes the ideology of Black Nationalism, organization leaders, and programs . . . and explains the behavior of Black nationalists, and the significance of the movement for not only the participants but also society as a whole.” Essien-Udom also examines the origins of the Black Nationalists tradition in the United States and the impact oppression played in its development. ⁴¹

As he explores the roots of the Nation, he traces its development and mass appeal overtime by positioning nationalism as the centerpiece of the movement. Like Lincoln, his study examined some of the reasons women, but mostly men, joined and remained in the Nation. Yet, unlike his contemporary, he offered a deeper analysis of the training programs, community outreach, and the University of Islam’s major goals and curriculum. Essien-Udom does a relatively more balanced job of critically exploring the Nation compared to Lincoln in both his general depiction of the group and specific survey of the women’s experiences.

Of the sources utilized for the text Essien-Udom included women’s voices, although minimally, within his manuscript, unlike Lincoln who relied heavily on males. He also incorporates his observation notes from visits to Temple meetings. Essien-Udom studied a wealth of articles from major newspapers, a few *Muhammad Speaks* articles, the *Messenger Magazine*, a Nation publication, Chicago No. 2 biographical sketch of Elijah Muhammad, “What we Should and Should not Eat” brochure and like Lincoln *The Supreme Wisdom* text. Essien-Udom obviously was able to garner more cardinal sources than Lincoln, which is

what most likely contributed to his more expansive depiction of the group. Yet, given his more diverse documentation he still held few sources that would help illuminate women's participation or he specifically chose not to explore this facet of the community; perhaps because he envisioned women as inconsequential to Black nationalism.

With respect to women, Essien-Udom drew on oral histories to help report on their experiences. According to one dialogue, he wrote "Sister Levina was attracted to the movement because it enhances one's status . . . She joined the Nation, like most Muslims, because she wanted to improve herself."⁴² Likewise, "we cannot overemphasize the prestige value to the Muslim women of the newly acquired sense of self-respect and dignity."⁴³ Essien-Udom acknowledged that women and men held coequal positions in the community, and he spent time recounting information about both the Fruit of Islam (F.O.I.) and the Muslim Girls in Training (M.G.T.) to support this claim.⁴⁴ Essien-Udom posited that in almost all areas of leadership there is both a male and female head, and both "occupy command positions."⁴⁵ He contends, "Ministers and captains are the principal officers of a Temple. They are assisted by Temple secretaries who are recorders, and work closely with them."⁴⁶ In a further effort to support his contentions in reference to the F.O.I. and M.G.T. he asserted:

Members of these two organizations are the most trusted among the followers of Muhammad and form the elite core of the Nation's leadership within a Temple . . . Secretaries may be male or female . . . There are two investigators, one man and one woman; they are responsible to the captains for the general welfare and for the conduct of the Muslims.⁴⁷

In relation to women's roles, he contends that: "the M.G.T. is organized along the same lines as the F.O.I. . . . The M.G.T. is concerned with the training of good Muslim women, and watches over the conduct and behavior of the female followers . . . Both the F.O.I. and M.G.T. is subdivided into the Sick committee and the Poor committee . . . In general the F.O.I and M.G.T. serve the adult education and initiation policies of the Nation."⁴⁸ Other mentions of women in this text include a short description of women's outward appearance observing that "in spite of their long robes, the neatness, and bearing of the Muslim women is . . . impressive." He goes on to mention several other elements about women stating, "many women believe that the Nation is a place to find responsible family men and . . . husbands for themselves . . . Members claim there is no hierarchy in the Nation . . . because all Moslems are brothers and sisters and they are all equal."⁴⁹ Again, Essien-Udom does a somewhat better job than Lincoln in providing a more nuanced portrait of Muslims, particularly women though the reader is still left knowing very little about Black Nationalism as it pertains to the public and private lives of Nation woman and how they may have negotiated between the two. With such a noteworthy attempt to be more inclusive, his narrative remains heavily male-centered.

In 1963, Louis E. Lomax wrote the last major scholarly work on the Nation of Islam before the death of Elijah Muhammad in 1975.⁵⁰ As a reporter, Lomax was responsible for the major coverage on Malcolm X, and co-produced the documentary, "The Hate that Hate Produced," in 1959. Lomax's work as a journalist for the white majority press no doubt influenced, and perhaps even

biased, his coverage on the Nation of Islam. Although considered a seminal text on the NOI, this was the first work dedicated mostly to Malcolm X as a popularized mouthpiece for the Nation. In part, Lomax provided a brief overview of the “origins and early history of the movement.”⁵¹ He describes the NOI as a “Chicago-based theocracy . . . [and] is one of the few religions ever produced by the American experience.”⁵² Lomax briefly touched on the role of the M.G.T. and F.O.I., but not to the extent of Essien-Udom or even Lincoln. Like the earlier Nation of Islam scholars, Lomax included brief details about the NOI’s economic and educational programs, and attempts to situate Black Muslims as a social phenomenon with a very short life span.⁵³ He argues that the Nation would not have been successful accumulating power were it not for the highly racialized backdrop of American society. He makes predictions concerning the direction and leadership changes in relation to the Nation within the next few years and its likely decline in appeal. Lomax’s work appears to have set the precedent for writers that followed him which centered Malcolm X as the definitive leader of the NOI as opposed to Elijah Muhammad. This work constitutes a significant shift in Nation of Islam scholarship marking the beginning of the revisionists’ historical accounts of the Nation that contribute to a mythical Malcolm X and, at times, Nation of Islam.⁵⁴

Concerning women, Lomax’s contributions to NOI scholarship were extremely minimal. In the few times women were discussed, it was consistently in the realm of domesticity, which it appears equates to subjugation, culminating into a one-dimensional idea of Nation women. He maintained that, “Black Muslim

women are schooled in the art and need for homemaking and are taught to take a back seat in the presence of their husbands. Muslim women almost never talk to strangers . . . and maintain a general silence that is unnerving.”⁵⁵ He then adds that the “Black Muslims are a male-oriented organization.”⁵⁶ Lomax perceived the community as a mostly “male-centered” group and thus offered very little else beyond these nominal remarks on the status and role of women within the Nation of Islam. Yet, there is no evidence provided to support women’s subjugation within the group. The sources used are from major newspapers and his personal interviews with Malcolm X which did not discuss women. From these scant sources, there is very little his work does to expound on the involvement of women in the community. Although a text about the Nation of Islam in general, Lomax gives the impression by only discussing men that he does not see women as integral to the community and, therefore, excludes them.

The Nation of Islam, 1975 to mid-1980s

Historian Clifton Marsh published the next major text on the NOI in 1984, twenty-one years after Lomax’s work.⁵⁷ His manuscript became available in the early 1980s at about the time Louis Farrakhan’s reconstituted Nation of Islam began to gain public recognition. By this period, W.D. Muhammad’s Nation of Islam had been completely reorganized, and aligned with what some regarded as orthodox Islam. It is difficult to explain the lapse in time between the works on the Nation of Islam, though some reasons might include: the assassination of Malcolm X, which resulted in the end of the popular fascination with the Nation of Islam by the media; the evolving and burgeoning outburst of Black power and

radicalism that embodied the activities of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, “US” organization, Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and other newly radicalized groups which began to gain media attention; also changes happened as a result of the passing of the Civil Rights Bill of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965, which wrongly signaled to some the end of segregation, socioeconomic, and political oppression, the need for organizations or what I describe as a community, like the Nation of Islam. Marsh’s study is significant because it represents the first decisive text on the Nation of Islam after Elijah Muhammad’s death. His manuscript critically grappled with the reorganization of the original Nation of Islam into the World Community of Islam under the leadership of W.D. Muhammad. In this text, Marsh offered a brief history of Black Nationalism; an analysis of the social conditions that contributed to the rise of the group; and a description of the relationship between the Nation and earlier historical figures like Noble Drew Ali and Marcus Garvey. Marsh’s book also included a summary of the contributions of Malcolm X and the conspiracies surrounding his assassination, as well as a recount of W.D. Muhammad’s rise to power and his reformation of Elijah Muhammad’s doctrine. He ends his work with an interview with W.D. Muhammad.

The dialogue between W.D. Muhammad and Marsh addressed several key areas. First, W.D. Muhammad explained the objections he had with his father’s religious and socio-political teachings. Second, the author discussed W.D. Muhammad’s previous suspension from the NOI under his father’s leadership; and the details around Malcolm X’s assassination, and the possible

assassins; third, he explored the role of women under the new order as compared to previous years, and the role of Clara Muhammad in the development of the group; and fourth, the status of the Muhammad universities and Nation businesses were explored, Louis Farrakhan's defection, and W.D. Muhammad's reflections on the NOI, including its former leaders, and their shortcomings and successes. Like his predecessors, Marsh attempted to provide a comprehensive examination of the Nation of Islam.

Marsh maintained, that given the origins and history of the Nation of Islam, W.D. Muhammad was able to successfully "transition the group from a primarily social movement that sought separation, to a primarily religious movement with a [distinct American patriotic lining and a] universal agenda and focus aligned with a more universal Islam."⁵⁸ Unlike Beynon, Marsh professed that a close relationship existed between the Moorish Science Temple (MST) and the NOI. He provided a comparison chart of rituals and practices from the NOI and MST, outlining the similarities between the two.⁵⁹ Marsh's overall conclusions about the NOI differed slightly from earlier scholars. Unlike Lincoln, Essien-Udom, and Lomax, he argued that "Elijah Muhammad ran his organization as the absolute authority. Muhammad appointed ministers of each temple; he also appointed supreme captains who were responsible to him. Beneath supreme captains were captains . . . The Temples were not autonomous; all orders had to be cleared through Elijah Muhammad."⁶⁰ This argument challenged early scholarship that sometimes emphasized not only the autonomy of the smaller communities, but in some cases direct deviation.⁶¹

Marsh's use of primary sources, culled from the Nation, was also inadequate. He employed a few interviews, only dialoguing with one Nation woman out of the eight members he consulted. In addition, he employs very few *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper articles, listing only one issue, two Nation publications produced under the new leadership June, 1975 and 1976 and two public addresses in 1976 and 1977 by Louis Farrakhan and W.D. Muhammad. Undoubtedly, Marsh used a plethora of secondary and other cardinal sources such as articles from major newspapers, phonographs, and government documents.

Marsh, like earlier scholars, did not discuss NOI women in any great detail. Akin to Lomax, he suggested that women maintained subordinate positions within the community, contending "in the Nation of Islam [women] under the administration of Elijah Muhammad had a subordinate role to men."⁶² Marsh claimed that under Elijah Muhammad women's "formal education was supplemented by attending MGT which teaches domestic skills---housekeeping, child-rearing, and hygiene." He also noted a few contributions of Clara Muhammad stating, "Elijah's wife was instrumental in keeping the movement together. Clara Muhammad was the supreme secretary of the movement during Elijah Muhammad's incarceration."⁶³

Marsh suggested that the repression of women changed under "the Muslim Women Development class established by W.D. Muhammad [which according to Muhammad] looks at life in a broader sense [in comparison to the M.G.T.]. She is encouraged as a woman to fulfill her mental capabilities."⁶⁴

Marsh added, "Wallace justifies the new status . . . [arguing that] we cannot make any distinctions between men and women in terms of intelligence, spirituality, or moral nature. Women are equal with men, and they are not to be treated any differently."⁶⁵ This does not appear to be a change in Nation doctrine, as presented here. W.D. Muhammad as well as other followers spelled out this ideology of equality in the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper throughout the early 1960s. Lincoln and Essien-Udom's scholarship subtly refute both Marsh's and Lomax's claims offering a hint that Nation of Islam women may have been involved in significant community work outside the private sphere, and held major leadership positions from the very beginning.

The Nation of Islam, 1990s to 2000s

There was a third phase in the historiography on the Nation that lasted from the 1990s through the dawning of the 21st century. Although the Nation of Islam, reconstituted, came back into the full public view after Farrakhan's rise to prominence in 1983, scholars nonetheless seemed to ignore the NOI. Twelve years after Marsh's book, Mattias Gardell published, *In The Name of Elijah Muhammad: Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam* in 1996.⁶⁶ This work, like Lincoln's research, was first written as a dissertation. Gardell earned his degree in comparative religion and is a professor in History of Religions at Uppsala University in Europe. His main area of research concerns "religious extremism." The book was published about a year after the 1995 historical Million Man March. The event, orchestrated by Louis Farrakhan, undoubtedly sparked a turning point in the writing on Nation of Islam history and influenced the consistent growth of

the scholarship on the Nation since that time. Gardell provides the first comparative study of the original NOI, that he calls the “most renowned and controversial” of groups in the United States and the newly reconstituted Nation of Islam, under the leadership of Louis Farrakhan.⁶⁷ Gardell explored the NOI from its beginnings, juxtaposing it with the Moorish Muslim movement and analyzing the Nation up to the 1995 Million Man March on Washington, D.C. He began his work, as most other scholars do succeeding Lincoln, with a brief overview of Black Nationalism. He next provided a summary of the history of Islam in the United States., and the emergence of Elijah Muhammad as divine leader of the original Nation of Islam. Later he explored the reign of Elijah Muhammad, the controversy that ensued surrounding his alleged infidelity, demise, and the new leadership, and present direction of the NOI.

Gardell’s critical assessment explored other offshoots of the group including Silas Muhammad’s Lost Found Nation of Islam and the Five Percent Nation founded by Clarence 13X. He delved deeply into Warith Deen Muhammad’s work, suggesting, like Marsh, that Muhammad brought the Nation closer to so-called orthodox Islam.⁶⁸ Considered is the controversy that evolved between Muhammad and Farrakhan and the development of a new Nation of Islam under Farrakhan’s direction. Finally, Gardell provided extensive evidence of federal government involvement in the dissension that arose in the NOI under Elijah Muhammad’s headship; the placing of FBI informants within the community; the eventual decline and dismantling of Elijah Muhammad’s work; and Malcolm X’s assassination.

The sources selected for his research are impressive, yet like his antecedents examining the Nation, Gardell's interviews are limited to mostly men and do not garner sources created *by* and *about* Nation women. He does offer an excess of speeches by NOI male leaders, songs, and recordings inspired by the NOI, FBI files, religious scripture, a number of major newspapers alongside *Muhammad Speaks* and *Final Call*, a number of new publications from the reconstituted NOI and a number of secondary sources. Still his sources do little to help formulate constructions of narratives concerning women as vital copartners in the development of the Nation.

Likewise, Gardell addressed the roles of Nation women only in the most nominal ways. He asserted that while "men participated in the FOI classes, women were organized in its female counterpart, the Muslim Girl Training–General Civilization Class, and children had their own pioneering organizations."⁶⁹ Gardell posited that, "following the principle of gender separatism the National M.G.T. Captain or national instructress of women is responsible for the training and teaching of the female members."⁷⁰ In comparing the original and the reconstituted Nation, he claimed that women were submissive under Elijah Muhammad's leadership but found a new freedom and independence under Farrakhan. Again, Marsh made this same assertion: Gardell stated, "Although the Honorable Elijah Muhammad emphasized that no nation could rise higher than its women, females were clearly reduced to a secondary status . . . [suggesting] the woman . . . does not have power in and by herself, and can come close to power only by submission to a man. [Yet] the NOI woman of today is said to be as much a reflection of the

creative divinity as is a man.”⁷¹ He also maintained: “Farrakhan referred to the fact . . . [that] Muhammad envisioned women flying planes, navigating ships and serving as ambassadors. He wanted to see women in every field of endeavor, except fields that degrade them.”⁷² In the end, Gardell argued, “though updated and modernized the basic view has not really changed since the days of Elijah Muhammad. Female power is still the regeneration of divine life, and to release her own power, a woman must find God in a man.”⁷³ Likewise, Gardell does very little to help expand our understanding of the NOI women outside these alleged assertions. Equally, like writers who precede him, Gardell avoids the opportunity to help clarify and expand our understanding of the role of women within the Nation as he attempts to provide a religious history of the group.

In 1997, Claude Andrew Clegg, chair of the department of History at the University of Indiana, Bloomington published his definitive work, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad*.⁷⁴ This study marked the first major biography on Elijah Muhammad. Clegg evaluates Elijah Muhammad’s life in four segments. In the first two, he examined Elijah Muhammad’s childhood in Macon, Georgia; his marriage to Clara Evans; the birth of their first few children; his racial experiences in the segregated South as a Black man and sharecropper; religious background and Christian upbringing; the family’s sojourn to Detroit; work in the automobile industry; first contact with Master Fard Muhammad; and his elevation to Nation leader.

The remaining two parts delved into his relationship with Malcolm X and other movement ministers; the economic enterprise and material wealth of the

movement; Muhammad's propaganda agenda; the plot and assassination of Malcolm X; FBI infiltration; the scandal concerning NOI secretaries; Sister Clara's death; organizational rifts; Muhammad's eventual death, and the naming of a new leader. Clegg focused on the NOI as an economic institution and less as a spiritual movement. Clegg ascertained:

Given his relevance to the evolution of Black Nationalist and religious thought in the twentieth century, Elijah Muhammad has unfortunately been the subject of few monograph-length studies. Until now, his life and work have been mired in simplistic popular images and distortions . . . Muhammad and his historical importance have still suffered, in many ways, from a surprising degree of scholarly neglect, which often vitiated his role in shaping American Islam and African American racial consciousness.⁷⁵

Although an obvious biography on Elijah Muhammad, Clegg's work is important to include because his observations regarding women make a slight departure from his predecessors. His discussion includes women in the context of spousal abuse, contending that, "in some Southern settings ministers laughed in the face of women who complained of abuse at the hands of their Muslim husbands. Older members of mosque informed national headquarters about beatings . . . but apparently to no avail."⁷⁶ It is important to note that this claim is unsubstantiated. Further, concerning the status of NOI women as it relates to the Black power and Women's movement, Clegg surmised:

Though gender issues were becoming more salient in discourse throughout the Black community and the larger society, the Nation made no significant efforts to liberalize its doctrine or practices regarding the masculine hold on power in the movement. To be sure nothing suggested that female believers as a group were discontented with the arrangement of authority and privilege in the Nation. No general desertion of mosque women occurred even in the wake of the Women's Movement. The Nation continued to be rigidly stratified into two different gender spheres, with women

directing the M.G.T.-G.C.C. and the domestic and family-oriented programs that were traditionally associated with it and men controlling everything else. In some progressive locales women perhaps wielded considerable power within the confines of their limited duties . . . the influence of female believers on the affairs of the mosque could be negligible, and their treatment even more despairing.⁷⁷

While Clegg implies that women typically occupied a subordinate position within the Nation of Islam, he not only does not offer any tangible proof of this but also concedes this notion of subjugation slightly when he wrote, “in some progressive locales women perhaps wielded considerable power within the confines of their limited duties.”⁷⁸ What these “limited duties” consists of the reader is never told but we are perhaps to assume encompass the domestic sphere. Moreover, he maintained, “women were a significant group within the Muslim fold. Black womanhood and the images of purity, domesticity, and piety . . . continued to remain a prominent part of the Muslim doctrine throughout the postwar period.”⁷⁹ Given Clegg’s brief synopsis of the status of women, he appears to share the sentiment of most earlier scholars that the NOI was a male-centered operation, and women were in most cases inconsequential and, therefore, relegated to the periphery of the narrative.

Clegg does candidly discuss his difficulty in securing information on the NOI, and the hostility he encountered when soliciting records from non-Muslims and Muslims alike. I too shared this experience at times. Clegg’s sources are an eclectic version of previously mentioned documents in other texts. In addition, Clegg used other secondary manuscripts, more utilization of *Muhammad Speaks* articles than previous scholars, audiotapes of the Muslim annual gathering,

Saviour's Day, court records specific to Elijah Muhammad's birthplace, businesses and other financial holdings. But, like most of the other researchers, Clegg's Nation material concerning women remains nonexistent.

In the years following Gardell and Clegg's works, there was a steady trickle of scholarship on the Nation of Islam. Richard Brent Turner published *Islam in the African American Experience* followed by the highly sensationalized text by Karl Evanzz's *The Messenger: The Rise and Fall of Elijah Muhammad*, Steven Tsoukalas' *The Nation of Islam: Understanding Black Muslims*, and Vilbert L. White's *Inside the Nation of Islam: A Historical and Personal Testimony by a Black Muslim Man*. Subsequently, Jesus Muhammad Ali wrote *The Evolution of the Nation of Islam* followed by Dennis Walker's *Islam and the Search for African American Nationhood: Elijah Muhammad, Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam*, Sherman Jackson's *Islam and the Blackamerican*, The Islamic Project Group's *A History of Muslim African Americans*, Michael Gomez's *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* and finally Hebert Berg's *Elijah Muhammad and Islam*, all published between the years 2002 and 2009.

After September 2001, some scholars took a different direction in their manuscripts by attempting to place the Nation of Islam within the broader historical context of Islam in the West. Michael Gomez's *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* spends a brief period on the original Nation of Islam, and instead explores early Muslims transported to the Americas by way of the Atlantic Slave trade. Gomez affirms that *Islamism*,

the continuation of Islam from capture to emancipation, did not occur, meaning there was no religious continuity in America between early Muslims brought from the continent of Africa and their later descendants. According to Gomez the Nation of Islam was not associated with earlier versions of Islam prior to Reconstruction; consequently, Islam, in his opinion, did not survive enslavement. Gomez's work is important as it provided a historical foundation for Islam in Black America prior to Noble Drew Ali's movement.⁸⁰

Edward Curtis's *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1975* is another significant work about the Nation.⁸¹ Curtis, a religious scholar, focuses on the evolution of Islam practiced by Blacks in the United States. Similar to his antecedents, Lincoln, Essien-Udom, and Marsh, Curtis utilizes an ethnographic approach, employing a few Nation records, interviews, major newspaper articles, and secondary sources to analyze the Nation of Islam, not as a protest group as Sherman Jackson espouses, nor as a political or economic institution as Clegg contends but chiefly as a vital religious force. Given the attention paid to the movement's educational and sociopolitical agendas, Curtis's work breaks new ground in interrogating its religious doctrine. In an effort to contribute to the discourse in Islamic Studies concerning Black American Muslims, Curtis focuses on the "legitimacy" of Elijah Muhammad's religious dogma "offer[ing] a comprehensive analyses of their rituals, ethics, and religious narratives . . . He further claims that NOI members, contrary to other scholars, incorporated various traditions from Sunni, and other historically Islamic symbols, texts, and practices into their religious activities."⁸² Also noteworthy is Curtis's

consideration of the historical tensions between African American Muslims and other Muslim groups or immigrant Muslims within the United States. In regards to the Nation of Islam Curtis suggests that members of the group felt a certain level of freedom in interpreting some of the organization mandates for themselves. He also explains why Black people were attracted to Elijah Muhammad's religiosity, clearly arguing that "Islam was a religion that spoke to [their] need for a faith that addressed the practical problems of Black life . . . Islam is a religion of life while Christianity is a religion of death . . . It's [Christianity] used to keep men enslaved."⁸³

Christianity . . . has produced more division and hate than all the other religions combined . . . It was white Christians who brought our forefathers into slavery, and it is white Christianity that is keeping you a subject people today. They rape and murder your families and bomb your churches if you demand equal rights with them and justice. The white Christians don't want you, nor do they like to see you go from them to your own. So let us unite and be One People under the Crescent of our religion, Islam.⁸⁴

In regards to women, Curtis provides a unique narrative in relating their experiences. He offers an oppositional account to gender inequalities generally written about Nation of Islam women when included in text. Instead, he proposes that equality was visible in the organization, particularly concerning education.

Curtis surmises:

Though women in the University of Islam system may have studied home economics and dressmaking, they also studied traditionally male-dominated subjects like science . . . Girls were . . . acknowledged frequently for their achievement in science....It is worth speculating that such training recognized the need for African American women to prepare for careers not only as domestics and teachers, but also as nurses [perhaps doctors]—one of the few professions open to Black women in the twentieth century.⁸⁵

Women as reported by Curtis were often in control of their bodies, spoke up about birth control, and were supported by other women within the Nation. He asserted that, "in New York, where Sister Alexandra first converted to Islam in the early 1970s, a female official at the mosque was quite open in her advocacy of birth control. According to Sister Alexandra, the woman told her class at the temple that women should not have any more babies than what they alone can take care of."⁸⁶ Although his rendering of women is also brief, Curtis utilizes most of the same materials as his forerunners, still lacking primary sources, but he culls a different interpretation of Nation women. I found no substantial documents from Curtis that were different from previous scholars, particularly those writings after 1975, that would suggest any reason for the differences in construal relating to women.

The latest work on the Nation of Islam is Herbert Berg's *Elijah Muhammad and Islam*. Berg's manuscript is a continuation of Curtis's work exploring the religiosity of the Nation of Islam under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad. Like scholars before Curtis, he surmises that the Nation of Islam was a misogynistic, male-dominated organization. More precisely he asserts, Elijah Muhammad's views in particular were paternalistic and narrow regarding women. With only a few pages committed to women Berg argues:

Generally, when Elijah Muhammad addressed issues related to women he did so by telling them how they should protect and control their wives and daughters . . . His views on the nature and role of women were explicitly patriarchal, with a strong emphasis on men controlling women.⁸⁷

Berg's work comes out as part of the growing concern about communities like the Nation of Islam in general and Islam in particular. This is due in large part to Islam's mounting popularity following September 11, 2001, marking the second time in U.S. history that an attack from abroad occurred on American soil.⁸⁸ What made this assault even more significant than Pearl Harbor was possibly the obvious religious and by extension political undertones, that resulted in a new interests in what some may consider Islamic subversive groups such as the Nation of Islam.

The great majority of the scholarship explored here is extremely important to the development of the overall historiography on the Nation of Islam in general, and Nation women in particular. However, as outlined in this chapter, although scholars have come from diverse disciplines their mishandling of Nation women, outside Curtis and to a lesser extent Essien-Udom, have not been challenged. They have changed their interpretations, assumptions, and methods very little over time. The few scholars who have been brave enough to research the Nation of Islam continue to center the ideas and experiences of men providing an unbalanced depiction of what I see as an extremely organized, deliberate and interconnected community.⁸⁹

Nation of Islam Women

As demonstrated within the male-dominated historiography, "Black Muslim women are predominantly portrayed as acquiescent wives and mothers in the literature on the NOI."⁹⁰ The first work that significantly addresses women in the Nation of Islam does not, for the most part, depart from these sentiments. *Little*

X: Growing Up in the Nation of Islam, written by journalists Sonsyrea Tate, is noteworthy because it provides the first personal narrative about women's encounters in the Nation. Tate's book is only briefly about her NOI experience as she also discussed her mother's transition to orthodox Islam prior to 1975. From the beginning, Tate suggested the Nation of Islam community was hypocritical, inconsistent and at times murderous, writing, "even though I had heard about the F.O.I. brothers threatening men . . . I never imagined that men in the Nation would kill babies."⁹¹ At the same time, she described the group as a communal and embracing movement although she felt this was more the case for officials as opposed to the rank-and-file. Tate wrote about sisterhood in the M.G.T. program as well as isolation felt by those persons who were suspended or put out of the Temple. Tate's analysis mostly concerned her perceptions of the contentious relations between officials and rank-and-file, mainly intra-gender relations.

She believed a hierarchy existed within the organization particularly at the local level where, according to her, officers abused their powers over the rank-and-file. Observing that, "Sister Captain . . . and the other officials . . . could make it hard on the no-ranking sisters they didn't like."⁹² According to Tate, the exploitation of power ran rampant in the Temples, and women were most times the victims of these abuses. She argued that women struggled severely in the Nation of Islam financially and emotionally. For instance, she relayed the story of a woman and her family who were starving, and in danger of being evicted because her husband sent all their money to Elijah Muhammad.⁹³

Like much of the previous scholarship, Tate discussed what she viewed as some of the most oppressive parts of belonging to the group, mainly the women's dress and the encouragement of women and men to attain traditional roles. She asserted that the dress code embraced by women sometimes elicited respect but many times it also afforded them contempt. She declared, "as a Muslim girl, I was respected . . . It kept the boys from catcalling out to me, but it would not thwart the taunts of girls who thought Muslim women were crazy or weak for allowing men to dictate what we wore and how we behaved."⁹⁴ This seems surprising that her peers would respond in this manner given she was younger than ten years old at the time. Tate implied that women's roles were extremely limited, even suffocating and that their main task in the Nation was to have babies and to cook, writing that her mother was always pregnant and having babies for the Nation; stating "GrandWillie and Ma made homemaking their full time job and babysitting their business."⁹⁵ Again, this seems highly unlikely that these were the only options afforded to women given that the Nation employed many women and several had careers outside the community, particularly during the period she is describing.

As an autobiography, we must approach this text with caution, as much of narrative by its very nature is conjecture. If we are to garner the experiences of women, we must interrogate what Tate contends about the subjugation of women juxtaposed with the narratives of women who actually lived the experiences for more than a few years. Tate's work must be utilized as at least

one springboard to discuss women's participation, and can be critically examined alongside other sources to perhaps begin to construct an accurate portrait.

When Tate began her narrative she told the reader, "While I was growing up, the Fruit of Islam, the security unit of the Nation of Islam, had made me, a small black child, feel safer than I felt at any other time in America."⁹⁶ As the story unfolds, Tate contends that she learned early on what was expected of women: "our Savior taught the brothers to protect us and furthermore, to control us and keep us in our place. My place as a Muslim girl was on the porch."⁹⁷ She also argued, "just like with the F.O.I., if you messed with one, you had to deal with them all. A girl couldn't have felt safer around them."⁹⁸ The question of protection appeared to solicit uncertainty in Tate. On the one hand when she reflects back, the belief is that she never felt safer with the promise of protection, however, as she moved deeper into her narrative she appeared to see the claim of protection as oppressive to women. This may be because of the time frame in which Tate is constructing her script which was during what some may consider the second wave feminist movement in the 1990s. Coupled with these feminist notions are also the times of explicit claims of isolation and alienation resulting from moving from one religious community to the next. Tate's experiences are a blend of NOI, several versions of orthodox Islam, and Christianity all before the age of fifteen. More importantly, Tate's move from a place of security at a very young age to hostility only further complicates and even perhaps distorts her memories. She argued, "growing up in the Nation of Islam and then having to go into the real world was like moving to another country, adjusting to a culture and

philosophy we had been trained to despise.”⁹⁹ Protection, as West argued in her work, does not inherently equate to subjugation yet from the majority of the writings on the Nation this appears to be the agreed upon interpretation.

Contrary to Curtis’s observations, Tate claimed that Nation of Islam women were not encouraged to pursue higher education, which is unfounded. She maintained that young girls were not supported to think about careers unless it was done with a teacher in private. “At eight years old, I knew there was women’s work and men’s work . . . At school we never talked about what we wanted to be when we grew up, except when our teachers encouraged our individual talents, privately.”¹⁰⁰ Moreover, “as a group, we girls learned that motherhood was the most important job a woman could have.” Curtis rejects this argument positing that women did and were encouraged to pursue careers specifically in the Sciences.

Tate provided a number of different portraits of women in the NOI: dissatisfied and oppressed; powerful and abusive; and caring and naive.¹⁰¹ Much of her reading of Nation women during her brief tenure contrast other unpublished accounts written by scholars who interviewed women who actually spent a significant period of their adult life in the community. In the dissertation by West, like Curtis, she offered a different interpretation than Tate. West succinctly argued that women were neither oppressed nor dissatisfied, that instead they actually worked “in partnership with men [and other women which] helped to empower themselves and the Black community.”¹⁰² Currin’s dissertation is also significant, concerning this point, although not as shrewd as

West, she asserted that “all the women interviewed expressed over and over again that they loved their experiences in the Nation of Islam, precisely because it taught them that they could accomplish what they will.”¹⁰³ Both accounts are in opposition to many of the encounters Tate described in her narrative.

The remainder of Tate’s autobiography delves into her family’s split from the Nation of Islam, and their journey into so-called orthodox Islam, and eventually back into Christianity. As Tate was very young during the 1960s and early 1970s, her narrative suffers from issues of memory and historical revision. According to her narrative she was no more than nine years old in 1975, the year Elijah Muhammad passed away, and the community decentralized.¹⁰⁴ Also, by 1973, Tate’s mother had joined a more orthodox Islam; and they were no longer Nation of Islam members, making her tenure even more ambiguous. Because of her age and also her short-lived experience in the community, Tate’s autobiography should be approached with serious caution. Most of her memories were restated from her first few elementary school years and seem to be over dramatized and severely exaggerated. Tate does not critically examine the collective memories of the women in her family whom she said witnessed the Nation of Islam first hand. She simply suggested that women were in awe of Elijah Muhammad, and they believed in him so they were willing to suffer. Most of the dissatisfaction that Tate relays concerns dress, and the appearance of being different, particularly as a very young person, when moving and socializing outside the community.

With obvious shortcoming Tate's work remains the only text, which attempts to explore the experiences of Nation women in any depth during the tenure of Elijah Muhammad. Therefore, contemporary scholarship that critically examines Nation women prior to 1975 under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad must be undertaken; this dissertation is but one attempt.

Beyond Tate's narrative, the scholarship on the Nation of Islam remains extremely male-centered and one-dimensional. The authors of Nation of Islam scholarship attempt to interrogate a community in which women were an integral part, yet, they remain marginalized within these texts. While minimally included, the discussion concerning Nation women typically falls within three areas: one, in relation to cooking and cleaning; two, concerning the subjugation of women by men; and three, surface observations about the M.G.T-G.C.C programs.

In the absence of a book-length study concerning women in Nation of Islam, I critically examine a few important articles that consider their experiences. Ula Yvette Taylor, historian and Black feminist, wrote "As-Salaam Alaikum, My Sister, Peace Be Unto You: The Honorable Elijah Muhammad and the Women Who Followed Him." In this article, Taylor suggested the Nation of Islam "camouflage[d] gender inequalities that enticed Black women into the Nation, despite its patriarchal core." Her work presents an analysis of the "female membership in the Nation of Islam under the Honorable Elijah Muhammad [compared with their work beneath W.D. Fard's headship]."¹⁰⁵ Taylor's main thesis is that Black women were duped into joining the Nation which was replete with inequity and abuse. Taylor envisions early Nation of Islam women, under

W.D. Fard, as empowered, declaring that, “temple women were clearly aggressive and assertive . . . [and] rose to the occasion by resisting dehumanization both verbally and physically.”¹⁰⁶ Also, she argued, there was a shift in women roles as well as their visibility when Elijah Muhammad took over the organization. Taylor posited that, “under Fard, Mission Sisters walked the streets disseminating their religion . . . featured as active members within the sparse Nation of Islam. By comparison, Muhammad believed that Nation women should exclusively remain in the home so that men could properly protect and provide for them.”¹⁰⁷ She added, “Elijah Muhammad restructured and restricted the public duties of women. Soon ‘Mission Sisters’ vanished because it was no longer their place to verbally witness to others. Instead, the mere physical appearance of women, one that displayed the appearance of serenity, (as opposed to a combative defiant woman) was to serve as an attraction for both men and women to seek membership.”¹⁰⁸

Taylor’s data is garnered from piecing together a few articles from *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper, mostly from the mid to late 1960s. She utilized a considerable number of secondary texts written on orthodox Islam, which both NOI members and orthodox adherents have already agreed were different in some very key areas, such as the magnitude of women’s involvement. As her precursors, Taylor pulled from *The Supreme Wisdom*. She also uses the seminal Nation texts such as *Message to the Blackman in America*, the definitive texts by Lincoln, Essien-Udom and the other manuscripts by scholars who have written about the NOI. Although she draws more from feminist scripts than any other

writer, Taylor utilized the same primary and secondary sources, devoid of Nation women writing, as her forerunners and arrived at the same conclusions of some earlier scholars, outside of Curtis, that Muslim women were oppressed under the leadership of Clara and Elijah Muhammad but better off when the group was directed by Fard or W.D. Muhammad.

I contend that women's roles within the Nation of Islam were extremely important, diverse and complex, and cannot be reduced to the old adage of patriarchy or female versus male struggles for power found in other Black Nationalists and Civil Rights groups. Taylor claimed, "the Nation of Islam provides one of the most imaginative sites to explore . . . intimate gender relations...and the creation of a Black nation."¹⁰⁹ I would agree and further suggest the Nation of Islam is an excellent site to discuss model or even comparatively utopian gender relations. "Utopian schemes are usually the result of intellectual efforts expended mainly in the effort to change existing conditions, [like sexism]."¹¹⁰ Also along the lines of gender dynamics, Taylor surmised, "many women joined the ranks of the Nation of Islam because of the "problematic dynamics within the Black power movement."¹¹¹ Moreover, "a host of Black power organizations, fraught with neophyte leadership, nepotism, and crippling masculinity, rapidly surfaced during the postmodern period. Disappointment and contention within Black Power ranks ironically gave way to an enhanced sense of the Nation of Islam as a radical political alternative."¹¹² This supports my contention that the NOI possesses fairly model gender relations. She concluded, the Nation of Islam "membership was rooted in gendered prescriptions . . . Men's

and women's roles had to be reconfigured based on gendered stereotypes and hierarchies, and regulated differently in order to achieve black redemption--- political emancipation, economic self-sufficiency, and social isolation from whites."¹¹³ Although Taylor initially inferred that the NOI reconfigured gender roles, in the end she asserted they were just as patriarchal as the other Nationalists groups but better at disguising their misogyny.

According to Taylor, "for the Nation of Islam, the emasculation of Black men and their lack of masculine agency were dialectically connected to a hyper-sexualized out of control, defiled, black woman."¹¹⁴ She goes on to make the case that, "a real Nation of Islam man was a masculine breadwinner and a good Nation of Islam woman was a feminine housewife."¹¹⁵ This reductionists critique offered by Taylor of the Nation's male and female roles is extremely problematic and ignores women's agency and the community attempts at redeveloping Black gender roles. She appeared to make the same unsupported observations of some of the earlier Nation scholars by stating, "Black male nationalists, within and outside of the Nation of Islam, presumed that women had to be controlled and assume[d] a passive role in order for men to rise up and be real men in the United States."¹¹⁶ Taylor also maintained, "restraining women, also an obsession among Middle Eastern Islamic fundamentalists, positions the Nation of Islam squarely in line with the patriarchal climate of Black power. [The NOI during the tenure of Elijah Muhammad were a far cry from "Middle Eastern Islamic fundamentalists] Muhammad . . . helped to camouflage the gender inequalities in the Nation of Islam with the affectionate rhetoric of elevation, love, protection,

and respect for black womanhood.”¹¹⁷ Yet, it is the expressions of love, protection and respect I argue were and had been absent in almost all other so-called Nation building efforts outside the Nation. Finally Taylor asserted, “it seems it did not matter (or matter enough to prevent membership) to these women that under the conditions of the Nation of Islam, as well as other Black nationalist organizations, respect for their personhood and protection from seething forces hinged on their complete obedience to all paternal figures.”¹¹⁸

These remarks make it evident that Taylor seems to hold fast to prior assumptions about Muslim women. Although Taylor, like her predecessors continually talk about subjugation of Nation women there is no substantial evidence to support these claims. Taylor wrote, “there are indeed complicated reasons why Nation of Islam women accepted what appears to be a second-class status.” Clearly, the few women she interviewed did not support this claim nor did Taylor provide evidence that maintains these allegations. Instead, Taylor maintained the ongoing myth of tyranny as representative of the NOI women’s experiences. It is unfortunate that as one of few published women who have written on the Nation of Islam, she single-handedly relegates NOI women to subordinate status with a stroke of her pen. She argued, “there was little room within the Nation of Islam to challenge prescribed practices or act as a critical citizen.”¹¹⁹ Again, this is contrary to women’s contributions to the community. She goes on, “women were re-socialized to wear long gowns and matching head wraps . . . [this] attire . . . kept . . . women within the appropriate Muslim style, covering them from wrist to ankle. She also averred, “in order to combat the

sexually deviant myths associated with Black womanhood, women wore long white gowns and matching head wraps.”¹²⁰ Taylor, like Tate, discussed Nation women clothing viewing it as yet another badge of oppression, and control instead of what it really signified, divinity, unity, a badge of courage, collective pride, a sign of distinction, and the symbol of a growing and powerful Nation.

Taylor walked a tight rope between indicting Nation women as subservient to declaring them progressive to some degree, but mostly the former. She presumed “the Black Power and Feminists movements . . . politicized many African American women . . . While many women embraced the . . . platform of the Nation they were more resistant to the Messengers decorum standards. Women constantly struggled to create a balance between . . . Muhammad’s rules and their political and personal desires . . . in the end . . . Muhammad’s Nation and his word was law.”¹²¹ What political and personal desires is Taylor referring to? Is she arguing that Nation women had political and personal desires that they were prevented from indulging while men were able to partake? Or that their desires were different from the NOI agenda? Is she suggesting they possessed no agency? All members who voluntarily embrace the Nation of Islam accept the laws that govern the community and when broken these individuals are penalized accordingly; the laws and disciplinary actions taken are not gender specific. Yet, Taylor made these kinds of claims throughout her work with little to no evidence. Before Elijah Muhammad, Taylor postulated, Nation women were more empowered. She argued: “the supports of women were ever present. In fact, women were central in defending the honor of their sisterhood and the temple in

court.”¹²² I argue that this remained the case throughout NOI history. She also assumed these women were more or less empowered than those that came before them writing “women represented the Nation in a public forum without appearing in their uniforms . . . women dressed in a fashion they deemed appropriate, they were clad in fur coats . . . Nation women demonstrated . . . their unity could not be reduced to cult-like identical dress.”¹²³ Again, Taylor is equating the unity of dress as oppressive. She contended that “mission sisters walked the streets disseminating their religion, and overall women were prominently featured as active members within the sparse Nation of Islam discourse. By comparison, Muhammad believed that Nation women should exclusively remain in the home so that men could properly protect and provide for them.”¹²⁴ Moreover, Taylor surmised, “The Nation blossomed into a patriarchal movement [under Elijah Muhammad’s leadership].”¹²⁵

Taylor posited that women entered the Nation membership under false pretenses. “Under the conditions of the Nation of Islam a woman’s protection depended on her complete obedience.”¹²⁶ On the other hand she argued, “female converts were not led like robots into the Nation . . . they had many concerns, and they contemplated their decision prior to accepting membership.”¹²⁷ She also suggested, “the Sister Captains were the most influential women in the . . . Nation . . . They were the leaders in the traditional sense, with formal authority in terms of regulating women . . . it was up to her to develop a community of women that were respected by other women and

men.”¹²⁸ She admitted, “in the end, the Nation of Islam empowered both men and women in different ways.”¹²⁹

Taylor’s writings are important because she is one of very few scholars who brings the experiences of Nation of Islam women center stage in her work, however, she provides, like her male counterparts, a narrowly defined and typical analyses of Black women based on few primary sources. She maintained the slant of scholars who have dramatized and generalized Black Muslim women’s experiences with those in other Nationalists groups during this period. An accurate and fair assessment of Nation women experiences is still needed.

Making Space: Nation Women in the American Historiography

Given the historiography outlined within this chapter, it is clear that historians, sociologists, and other scholars have not adequately explored the contributions made by women to the Nation of Islam prior to 1975. Instead, the great majority of texts that have been written on Black women’s experiences chiefly focus on so-called orthodox or classical Islamic Muslim women as opposed to those women who laid the groundwork, and constituted the great majority of Muslim women in the United States during the era of Black consciousness. Women in the original Nation left no memoirs, journals or other personal affects that may give a more nuanced picture of their public and private lives. Yet, it is clear, given the moments of inclusion by authors, these women were central figures in the success of the community, and they were most certainly involved in its development and sustainability. Women like Clara Muhammad, Lottie X, Ethel Sharieff, Tynetta Muhammad, Christine Muhammad,

and others are absent from the historical record. Without Clara Muhammad as head of the Nation of Islam during the imprisonment of Elijah Muhammad in the early 1940s, the group may have declined significantly or even totally disbanded. More work, even a biography, should be completed on Clara Muhammad and other Muslim women, particularly as it concerns their efforts in alternative schooling movement within the United States.

To some critics, as evidenced in the lack of books, it appears that Nation of Islam women were not very progressive under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad, while still others suggest, although minimally, that women played complementary roles to their male counterparts in almost all aspects of the community. Essien-Udom, Curtis and at times Taylor all supported the notion that the gender roles were progressive within the community, and the "Nation of Islam empowered both men and women in different ways respectively."¹³⁰ Though recent scholars have begun to explore the significant labor and roles of 20th century Black women, including Club, Church, Nationalist, and Mutual Aid society women, the women of the Nation of Islam continue to go unnoticed.¹³¹ This silence may be a result of these women belonging to what is viewed by many as a minority religion. Consequently, this adds to the isolation of Black Muslim women as they tote a 4-tier consciousness comprised of race, class, gender, and now religion.

Still, evidenced in more recent scholarship concerning Islam and its origins in the United States, this sentiment appears to be changing, although slowly.¹³² The Nation of Islam has contributed significantly in a number of areas,

including: their efforts in the education; the breaking of the religious monopoly of Christianity in the Black community; solidifying Islam in America; igniting and spurring the modern Black power movements, and developing global Black consciousness; decreasing recidivism among Black males; empowering women to reclaim their homes; and providing economic autonomy to a large number of Black people through the creation of jobs. Despite their obvious value to American history, and the fact they continue to be an important force in many large Black urban centers, the Nation of Islam (original and reconstituted), particularly concerning women, remains a largely marginalized and under-explored subject by academics, resulting in a glacial silence.

The research conducted by most of the scholars who have written about the Nation of Islam not only marginally included women in the research but also ignored the breadth of their experiences as it relates to the overall community. The vast majority of scholars have failed to include, in any statistically significant quantity, a review of accounts or documents by, from or about women who were actual members of the Nation of Islam for any meaningful period. This latter point can not be highlighted emphatically enough for it speaks to the same poignant critique of Eurocentric scholars leveled by the chorus of intellectuals who comprise the very field of African American Studies itself. This core critique is one that demands that the true nature of the subject of any historical, anthropological, sociological, psychological or theological study can never be accurate, nor complete, where said research is devoid of at least some representation of the authentic voice and perspective of the subject by, and from

the subject. While some leeway may be afforded to those scholars who choose to examine people and cultures that have been long extinct, no such equivocation can be accepted in the case of research that seeks to describe the experiences, and perspectives of a group of people who are very much alive and present, a category that women from the original Nation of Islam most certainly occupy. During the decades when numerous texts have been written on the Nation of Islam, there has been, and continues to be, sufficient numbers of potential research participants for those scholars who endeavor to take the steps to build the necessary cogent relationships with former Nation of Islam members in order to elicit and secure adequate primary data and documents, just as I had to do in conducting my own research.

NOTES

¹ *Jet Magazine*, "Nation Mourns Muslim Leader: Leaders Praise Legacy of Elijah Muhammad," March 13, 1975, 20.

² *Ibid*, 21.

³ Michael A. Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Verbrugge, *Muslims in America*.

⁴ Lee P. Brown, "Black Muslims and the Police," *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science* 56, no. 1 (1965): 126; Mattias Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad: Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Hakeem Lumumba, "The Impact of Al-Islam on the African American Population," *Counseling and Values*, 47(2003): 210, <http://find.galegroup.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/itx/start.do?prodId=EAIM>.

⁵ Worthy, "The Angriest Negroes," 105.

⁶ Pope, "The Status of Nation Women"; West, "Nation Builders: Female Activism in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1970"; Ali, "The Foundation: Women in the Nation of Islam"; Amatullah-Rahman, "She Stood by His Side and at Times in His Stead"; Currin, "Portrait of a Woman: The Inaccurate Portrayal of Women in the Original Nation of Islam."

⁷ *TIME*, "Black Supremacists," August 10, 1959.

⁸ Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 254.

⁹ Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America*; Muhammad; *How to Eat to Live* Vol. 1; Elijah Muhammad, *How to Eat to Live* Book II (Atlanta: M.E.M.P.S., 1972); Elijah Muhammad, *The Fall of America* (Chicago: Muhammad's Temple of Islam No. 2, 1973); Elijah Muhammad, *Our Savor Has Arrived* (Chicago: Muhammad's Temple No. 2, 1974); Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X with the assistance of Alex Haley* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), 122.

¹⁰ Though Clara Muhammad was frequently featured in the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper she contributed only one article during its entire operation.

¹¹ Obituary of Erdmann Doane Beynon. *The Geographical Review* 34, no. 2 (1944): 336 <http://www.istor.org.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/stable/pdfplus/210128.pdf>.

¹² Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants in Detroit," 894.

¹³ *Ibid*, 901.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 897-898.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 894 and 903. I am using the term "organization" only to reflect when NOI scholars have used this term to describe the community although it cannot be confined to such a limited term.

¹⁶ Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants in Detroit," 898.

¹⁷ *TIME*, "The Black Supremacists."

¹⁸ Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants in Detroit," 895.

¹⁹ Fauset's, *Black Gods of the Metropolis*; Bontemps and Conroy, *They See A City*.

²⁰ Lincoln, *Black Muslims in America*.

²¹ The Moorish Science Temple is small and perhaps even insignificant by the 1930s. Lawrence H. Mamiya, "Islam in America: Problems of Legacy, Identity, Cooperation, and Conflict among African American and Immigrant Muslims," in *How Long This Road? Race, Religion, and the Legacy of C. Eric Lincoln*, eds. Alton B. Pollard, III and Love Henry Whelchel, Jr. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 93.

²² Christianity as the dominant religion see Walker, *David Walker's Appeal, To the Coloured Citizens of the World but in particular, and very expressly, to those of the United States*; Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*.

²³ Pollard, Henry and Whelchel, *How Long this Road: Race, Religion & the Legacy of C. Eric Lincoln*, vii and xviv.

²⁴ *Ibid*.

²⁵ C. Eric Lincoln was a Christian theologian and part of a long tradition of Christian ministry. His personal and professional training most certainly influenced his rendering of Muslims and his limited inclusion of women.

²⁶ Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, iv.

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- ²⁷ Ibid, 5.
- ²⁸ Ibid, 246.
- ²⁹ Ibid, 26, 223-226 and n38, 259. Lincoln estimates that as of 1959 there were more than 100,000 members; Louis Lomax places the number at a quarter million or lower. Louis Lomax, *When the Word is Given . . . A Report on Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X and the Black Muslim World* (Cleveland, OH: The World Publishing Company, 1963), 18.
- ³⁰ Ibid, 31.
- ³¹ Ibid, 194.
- ³² Ibid, 83.
- ³³ Islamic Articles of Faith, see Hammudah Abdalati, *Islam in Focus* (Olleya-Riyadag, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Islamic Teaching Center, n.d.), 9
- ³⁴ Ibid. 83.
- ³⁵ Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 23.
- ³⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁷ Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America*, 147-149.
- ³⁸ Ibid, 147; Edward E. Curtis, IV., *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1975* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2006), 28-31.
- ³⁹ Pollard, Henry and Whelchel, "How Long This Road" *Race, Religion, and the Legacy of C. Eric Lincoln*, 5.
- ⁴⁰ Outside status is denoted here by not being an American born Black and therefore not necessarily aware of the daily atrocities of living as a minority in a highly racialized environment.
- ⁴¹ E.U. Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America*, vii.
- ⁴² Ibid, 85-86.
- ⁴³ Ibid, 88.
- ⁴⁴ More detail concerning these groups are addressed in Chapter 3.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid, 145.
- ⁴⁶ Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America*, 147.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid, 158-159.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid, 101, 110 and 143.
- ⁵⁰ Louis E. Lomax, *When the Word is Given: A Report on Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X and the Black Muslim World*.
- ⁵¹ Ibid, 12.
- ⁵² Ibid, 17.
- ⁵³ Ibid, 106.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid, 18.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid, 81.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid.
- ⁵⁷ Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Transition from Separatism to Islam, 1930-1980*.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid, 3.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid, 45.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid, 54.
- ⁶¹ Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America*, 179; Lomax, *When the Word is Given: A Report on Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X and the Black Muslim World*, 92-94.
- ⁶² Lomax, *When the Word is Given: A Report on Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X and the Black Muslim World*, 95-96.
- ⁶³ Ibid, 61.
- ⁶⁴ Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Transition from Separatism to Islam, 1930-1980*, 96.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶⁶ A. Marshall, *Louis Farrakhan: Made in America*, (United States: BSB Publishing, 1996); Mattias Gardell, *In The Name of Elijah Muhammad: Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam*.

4. ⁶⁷ Gardell, *In The Name of Elijah Muhammad: Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam*,

⁶⁸ Ibid, 107-109.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 62.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 141.

⁷¹ Ibid, 333.

⁷² Ibid, 334.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Clegg, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad*.

⁷⁵ Ibid, xi.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 242.

⁷⁷ Ibid. The claims made here are unsupported. Clegg cites West work "Nation Builders" and the respondent suggest she was suspended for voicing her opinion about sisters who wear the dress while not acting respectable. Clegg interpretation appears to be inaccurate. More importantly, the idea of being suspended as a result of something like this seems highly unlikely as there were set mandates that would illicit suspension from a mosque. Additionally, members were not suspended based on the whims of one individual as depicted. A full investigation had to be completed if accused and the blamed party was brought before the community or the officials of the mosque. This regimen was communicated again and again in not only the interviews done for this dissertation but in other works like Lincoln and Essien-Udom who actually give detail about the structure of the community and its policies. This is an example of scholarship that lacks credible evidence to support many of the constructions of the NOI women.

⁷⁸ Clegg, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad*.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 242-243.

⁸⁰ Sylviane Diouf, in *Servants of Allah*, does not center her work on NOI but she does discuss Islam prior to Noble Drew Ali and the Nation like Gomez. She agrees with Gomez work that Islam did not have continuity between slavery and freedom. Diouf narrative begins her discussion of Islam before Africans reach the Americas. Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah, African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 207.

⁸¹ Evanzz, *The Messenger: The Rise and Fall of Elijah Muhammad*; Jesus Muhammad Ali. *The Evolution of the Nation of Islam* (Chicago: JMA, 2002); Sonsyrea Tate, *Little X: Growing Up in the Nation of Islam* (Knoxville: Tennessee University Press, 2005); Dennis Walker, *Islam and the Search for African American Nationhood: Elijah Muhammad, Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam* (Georgia: Clarity Press, 2005); Sherman Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); The Islamic Project Group, *A History of Muslim African American*; Edward Curtis, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1975*.

⁸² Edward E. Curtis, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1975*.

⁸³ Ibid, 39.

⁸⁴ Elijah Muhammad, "ISLAM: THE REMEDY FOR THE SO-CALLED NEGROES' ILLS" *Moslem World & U.S.A.*, ed. Abdul B. Naeem, March-April 1957, 19.

⁸⁵ Curtis, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1975*, 154.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 127.

⁸⁷ Herbert Berg, *Elijah Muhammad and Islam* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 83.

⁸⁸ The attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 was a turning point in U.S. history particularly concerning so-called subversives. It is generally considered the first attack on U.S. soil by a foreign power. See also American responses to Islam. Jane I. Smith, "The Arrival of Muslim Immigrants in America," in *Muslims in America*, ed. Verbrugge, 23-25; Mark Singer, "The Backlash After the September 11 Attacks," in *Muslims in America*, ed. Verbrugge, 122-123;

⁸⁹ I mention "brave enough" because of the experiences Clegg discusses at the end of his text concerning the hostility he encountered in trying to research the Nation of Islam as a result of their very demonized image instigated by the media. Although the media helped catapult the community into the spotlight, boosting its popularity, it also had damaging effects. I also received negative quips, frowns and other gestures, particularly about Muslim women, as I sought out information in repositories and other research sites.

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- ⁹⁰ West, "Nation Builders: Female Activism in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1970," 136.
- ⁹¹ Ibid, 114.
- ⁹² Ibid, 92.
- ⁹³ Ibid, 93 and 106.
- ⁹⁴ Tate, *Little X: Growing up in the Nation of Islam*, 121 and 155.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid, 88.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid, 4-5.
- ⁹⁷ Ibid, 82.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid, 74.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid, 121.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 86.
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid, 84, 88, 90,91, 92 and 96.
- ¹⁰² West, "Nation Builders: Female Activism in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1970," iv; Clegg also agrees women were not dissatisfied within the Nation. Clegg, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad*, 242.
- ¹⁰³ Currin, "Portrait of a Woman: The Inaccurate Portrayal of Women in the Original Nation of Islam," 34.
- ¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 120.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ula Yvette Taylor, "As-Salaam Alaikum, My Sister, Peace Be Unto You: The Honorable Elijah Muhammad and the Women Who Followed Him," *Race & Society* 1 no. 2 (1998): 178.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 181.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 182.
- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid. Taylor provides no evidence to support this claim. The example she uses of women under Fard going to battle for their sisters and brothers is something women continue you to do throughout NOI history at least until 1975. See Tate, *Little X: Growing Up in the Nation of Islam*, 181. Also see interview with Sister Dela and Sister Barbara in Chapter 2. .
- ¹⁰⁹ Ula Y. Taylor, "Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam: Separatism, Regendering, and a Secular Approach to Black Power after Malcolm X (1965-1975)" in *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980*, eds. Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 178.
- ¹¹⁰ Joseph Taylor, "The Rise and Decline of a Utopian Community, Boley Oklahoma," *The Negro History Bulletin*, March 1940, 90.
- ¹¹¹ Taylor, "Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam: Separatism, Regendering, and a Secular Approach to Black Power after Malcolm X (1965-1975)," 183.
- ¹¹² Ibid, 195.
- ¹¹³ Ibid, 190.
- ¹¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁵ Ibid, 191.
- ¹¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁷ Ibid, 192.
- ¹¹⁸ Ibid, 192-193.
- ¹¹⁹ Ibid, 193.
- ¹²⁰ Taylor, "As-Salaam Alaikum, My Sister, Peace Be Unto You: The Honorable Elijah Muhammad and the Women Who Followed Him," 180.
- ¹²¹ Ibid, 194.
- ¹²² Ibid, 181
- ¹²³ Ibid.
- ¹²⁴ Ibid, 182
- ¹²⁵ Ibid.
- ¹²⁶ Ibid, 183
- ¹²⁷ Ibid, 185
- ¹²⁸ Ibid, 187
- ¹²⁹ Ibid, 193
- ¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Jo Ann Gibson Robinson and David J. Garrow, *Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson*; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Church, 1880-1929*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, *If it Wasn't for the Women . . . Black Women's Experiences and Womanist Culture in Church and Community*; Gerda Lerner, ed. *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*.

¹³² Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas*; Alan D. Allen Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum America: TransAtlantic Stories and Spiritual Struggles* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

Chapter 3

A Voice from the East: Women, Islam, and Gender Capital

I was in the Nation of Islam for a while . . . which was the premier nationalist group in America . . . I had gone into the Nation because I was raising my children by myself, and the public school situation was pathetic. The Nation was one of the places to receive a good education at the time; it was the place to go for some kind of protection. It was doing some really interesting things in attempting to build businesses and schools.

--Sonia Sanchez¹

This chapter is comprised of two parts. Part I offers first-person accounts collected in a little over a year. It provides a textured description of the experiences of Muslim women in their own words, a critical part of *Africana Womanism*. These “nation builders,” laborers and rank-and-file members, were a part of the Nation of Islam during the era of black consciousness from 1945 to 1975.² The fact that there is a dearth of primary sources about Nation women makes the utilization of their voices in any work paramount to helping to construct an accurate portrait of their public and private lives. Instead of a ‘backseat,’ their narratives take center stage in this dissertation. The individuals highlighted are representative of many of the Muslim women who were long-term adherents, and like most early supporters, assisted in developing Nation programs. Though these women vary in age, socioeconomic background and socialization, they were chosen because they provide a breadth of experiences as it concerns joining and persisting in the Nation of Islam. Because very little is known about NOI women during this period, the chapter ends with brief biographies of some of the women in the community. There are no records of the great majority of

women who held sway in the Nation of Islam. Many research participants named countless women who were local and national leaders within the community. While details of many of those individual stories appear to have been lost, women who were either discussed in interviews or presented in Nation literature are highlighted in this chapter, even if only briefly. It is vital that like the women before them, Mary Church Terrell, Nannie Burroughs, and Mary McLeod Bethune, that their contributions be acknowledged, honored and recorded for posterity in their roles as pivotal “sisters in the struggle” from the 1940s to the 1970s as Nation women worked hard to build a legacy that exalted Black consciousness.³

The majority of this chapter is based on the information provided by research participants. Some parts are developed from what women and men shared in our discussions about life in the Nation while other sections are either taken directly from Nation materials such as yearbooks, newspapers, brochures, bulletins, and correspondence, and other materials or are the researcher’s interpretation or analysis, using a combination of interview responses, informal conversations with participants and a number of primary and secondary works. Based on the resources listed here, I analyzed and synthesized the narratives, weighed primary and secondary works, and theorized ways to interrogate NOI women where possible to determine why Black women joined the NOI, remained or left. This was done by considering, among other things, the full range of women’s experiences, “in their words,” highlighted in the interview including great successes, disappointments, strengths and weaknesses of

community, and most memorable moments, as well as their underlying religious, political, and social motivations. I also document what leadership positions, if any women may have held, while concurrently discussing how gender roles were expressed within the group. Prior to each narrative is my broad but critical analysis of their diverse encounters.

The Appeal for Women

The Old Man was asked ‘why do you plant these fig trees? You are old and will not be around to enjoy them. The Old Man replied ‘I plant them not for me, but for those who will come after me.’⁴

Not many people understand what it means to belong to a legacy—it was perhaps the above quixotic idea, or the possibility of contributing to a historic moment that prompted both women and men to crowd the ranks of the Muslims during the post-World War II period. The Nation’s increasing popularity could have also been, attributed to what Taylor contends was their perceived existence as a “radical political alternative” from other groups of the period.⁵ Whatever the initial motivations, it appears that a sense of mutual respect across gender lines was one of the most influential factors for women converts who joined the Nation of Islam. From its inception the Nation was heralded for fostering a communal environment that promised to provide both men and women with the training to harness and perfect their “natural” strengths as mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers; equality of the sexes not only in word, but in practice. In a survey given to research participants 16 out of 18, 89 percent of respondents (both men and women), agreed that women were always highly respected within the community, and 16 out of 18, 89 percent, said men and women roles were comparable or

complementary.⁶ In 1960, W. D. Muhammad wrote an article titled the “Impact of Islam on Muslim Women”; in this editorial Muhammad explained the equality of the sexes in Islam, and the purpose of the Muslim Girls-In-Training and General Civilization Classes (M.G.T & G.C.C.) for Muslim women.⁷ He asserted:

Among the Muslims the training of men and women is given equal attention because the Quran makes women the equal of men . . . They excel each other in some respects, yet they are equal in the sight of God.”⁸

This essay placed women within the context of Africana Womanism far ahead of its time, fostering a philosophy of co-partnership in inter-gender relationships. Such an approach helped contribute to a “community first” ideology, one of the bedrock principles of the Black consciousness movement.⁹ This community first ideology is aligned with Cheryl Townsend Gilkes’ contentions about “community work” outlined in her text, *If It Wasn’t for the Women . . .*” *Black Women’s Experience and the Womanist Culture in Church and Community*. Gilkes’ ideas about community mirror the proclamations of Nation members when she concludes:

Community work consists of all tasks contained in strategies to combat racial oppression and to strengthen African-American social, economic, and political institutions in order to foster group survival, growth, and advancement. Community work is focused on internal, development and external challenge, and creates ideas enabling people to think about change . . . Community work may insist, rightly or wrongly, that community members change their behavior to avoid being treated in terms of prevailing stereotypes. Community work is a constant struggle, and it consists of everything that people do to address oppression in their own lives, suffering in the lives of others, and their sense of solidarity or group kinship.¹⁰

Gilkes ideas about community work are aligned with the NOI programs.

Muhammad's sentiments regarding Nation women were also very much linked with the forbearers of Black liberatory and self-determinative thinking like Frederick Douglass, who was a staunch supporter of the equality of the sexes.¹¹ As such, race and gender played fundamental roles in crafting Muslim identities during the formation and development of the Nation. This is extremely significant as the NOI had comparatively utopian gender relations especially relative to their counterparts in other Black organizations during the period, particularly during the 1940s and 1950s. While I do not assert that there were no projections of gender inequality or sexist attitudes and behaviors by male members on an individual level, as certainly some converts to the Nation brought their own patriarchal baggage with them, as did women who were recipients of sexist behaviors, I do contend that such conduct was not supported by the doctrine or condoned by the expressed values of the community. A core driver of the Nation's ideology was a positive and active sense of identity that applied to both women and men neither of whom was encouraged to cede their agency in any context, whether inside or out of the community. Even Tate acknowledges in her autobiography that one of the Nation's core mandates for women was that they be strong and capable and were required to take decisive action, a stark contrast to the accepted role and responses of other women of the time. Tate writes:

"From the time I was in the Nation, I was taught that women [and men] had a clearly defined role and domestic responsibility. But I wasn't taught that we should be physically abused. In fact, I was taught that we shouldn't be. I remembered our self defense lessons in Muslim Girls Training class. It was all right for a sister to stand up for herself, I had learned. If somebody, any body, even your husband, kicks you, you'd better kick back and kick harder. If you gotta go down, you'd better go down swinging. We were taught that

it's better to report a husband and let the brothers in the family or in the Temple deal with him. But in cases of emergency, no Muslim sister better stand still crying if she's under attack."¹²

This statement is consistent with the NOI's overall policy that states, "we do not turn the other cheek. We are not the aggressor, but we fight with those who fight with us."¹³ The gender roles of Muslims and the agency of women that aid in their success will be further explored later in this chapter.

Although this dissertation is not a comparative study on religion during the post-World War II era, it is important to understand that Christianity became the antithesis to Islam in the United States during this time, a fact that reflects its militancy in its strident rejection of the accepted, previous imposed standard.¹⁴ While casting off Christianity, and the dependent culture associated with it, Nation women sought to carve out a new spiritual legacy, one that would make their progeny feel proud and empowered.¹⁵ The research reveals this was an important draw for many new converts to Islam who spoke of the pitfalls of Christianity for Black people in America.¹⁶

Unlike their Christian counterparts, Black Muslim women in America were thrice 'stigmatized' in terms of their attire, religious beliefs and race. The post-World War II years were perhaps one of the most repressive times for African Americans since slavery, yet Black Muslim women voluntarily exposed themselves to these second (attire) and third (religious) tiers of ostracization, and oppression upon their conversion to Islam. As a consequence, the most popular notion held then, and even now, concerning Muslim women who joined and stayed in the Nation of Islam was the claim that most, if not all, passively

“followed their men into the religion,”¹⁷ a perspective wholly challenged by the results of this research.

Additionally, scholars speculate that Black Muslim women who became adherents of the Nation “were oppressed in much the same way as White women [and Black Christian women]—i.e., were denied political and economic roles of significance within the church and other sociopolitical organizations.”¹⁸ Again, the research shows that this is far from true, and that in fact the history of the experiences of women who joined the Nation of Islam was far from typical.¹⁹ Instead, once Black women entered the world of Islam in North America their lives became increasingly complex and unique compared to their Christian and/or white counterparts, differences most certainly informed by the sociopolitical conditions of the period.²⁰ Yet detractors of the Nation of Islam community continue to argue that Blacks joined out of intimidation, emotionalism, and, perhaps most infamously, a seething hatred by Blacks looking for revenge against whites, as Nation people were described as “the purveyor[s] of this cold black hatred.”²¹ In reality, my research revealed that there are several push-pull factors that contributed to the influx and persistence of Black women in the Muslim ranks particularly from 1945 to 1975.

The pull factors are those positive socioeconomic, religious and political circumstances that attracted women to the community post-World War II. First, Christianity, according to newly converted Muslims, was no longer considered a liberating force, as it had perhaps been during slavery and reconstruction. Instead, according to Nation lore, Christianity had become equated with

dependency, “misfortune, slavery, and death.”²² Explained further:

Christianity, the slavemasters’ religion . . . teaches you to pray to God who isn’t God, and make you want to love your enemy but hate your own . . . the Cross of Christianity was a symbol of death and destruction and thus it could not be expected to do any good whether you wear it around your neck or hang it in your bedrooms.²³

Furthermore Elijah Muhammad argued that, “their Christianity is a curse to us (the Black man) and is full of slavery teaching. They have poisoned the Bible with their adding to and taking from the truth.”²⁴ Lincoln concurs stating that the NOI insisted there was a “close link between [the] Christian church and White supremacy.”²⁵

Other pull factors may include: educational exclusivity; political activism; assurances of mass economic progress, for men and women; guarantees of respect and protection for women and men; ennoblement and glorification of the image of the Black woman; promise of eligible mates; honoring and legitimization of traditional women’s roles like motherhood, wifery; training in the intra-personal affairs; professed success in reducing criminal recidivism and drug use; employment options outside of the white-controlled economy; provocative messages of hope, liberation, militancy, and rebellion; and perhaps most importantly the opportunity to gain important status in an autonomous Black endeavor such as positions like Directors, Captains, Investigators, Lieutenants, and Secretaries.²⁶ These were ranks poor and uneducated women were unlikely to attain in other communities during the period.

“Push-factors” are those negative social and socioeconomic conditions present in a Nation member’s previous community and life, particularly as a part

of mainstream society that may have propelled them away from that former life. For women, these factors most often encompassed a lack of moral, eligible and employed Black men; rising concerns about protection and safety from violence; abuse and exploitation of women; disillusionment with the snail-like movement toward socioeconomic and political equality; loss of faith in white atonement; high potential for a life of poverty; mistreatment and abuse by white employers, and limited and alternative employment options.²⁷ Additional push-factors might also include continued disenfranchisement; life threatening lifestyles; proliferation of white supremacy and ongoing racial violence directed toward Blacks. Conceivably this list could also include the misogyny of the heavily male-centered civil rights and Black power organizations during the late 1950s and 1960s, where Black women “constantly battled the Black male leadership about their insensitivity to women’s needs . . . [and Black men’s] failure to assist in the political development of women.”²⁸ Ironically, according to Cole and Guy-Sheftall, “subtle and not so subtle notions that Black women, like children, are best seen and not heard, and that a Black woman should stand several paces behind her man permeated [mainstream] religious circles, and were also present in prescriptions for proper behavior by Black women in civil society.”²⁹ Black Muslim women have not articulated similar encounters or the same barriers to recognition, positions of power or other significant roles within the Nation of Islam as did their sisters within other communities similarly engaged in the struggle for liberation.³⁰

The following discussion and analysis is of testimonies from women who

joined the Nation of Islam from the 1950s to the 1970s. The women presented within this chapter experiences were simultaneously unique and arguably representative of other Nation women's encounters. Moreover, the four accounts signify a broad spectrum of socioeconomic, educational, spiritual and familial conditions prior to joining. Their narratives illustrate how complex women's decisions were concerning converting, remaining and, for some, eventually leaving, in each instance often an amalgam of several push-and pull-factors are apparent.

The Religious Factor

Since I've come into the nation, my frozen mind has begun to thaw out as a result of the warm teachings of our Messenger from Allah, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. I am no longer a mental zombie, but a refreshed minded person, aware of the true God's identity, and my wonderful black heritage . . . As a former Christian, I had only one thing going for me, and that was my open-mindedness to the truth of Islam . . . All my life I had doubts concerning Christianity, so I guess that was why my family and I went from church to church in search for truth that was comprehensive rather than an unquestionable mystery. I visited Baptist churches, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Science of the Mind, none of which could remove the wrinkles from my forehead from lack of understanding.

--Sister Vanecia X
Pasadena, California³¹

Religion has always been a critical factor in the sociopolitical and cultural life in Black America.³² According to Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "The church . . . functioned as a discursive, critical arena—public sphere in which values and issues were aired, debated, and disseminated throughout the large black community."³³ Deborah Gray White argues, the church became the political arena where especially men, vied for leadership and exercised dominance."³⁴ Although similar to

the church, utilizing the mosque as an all-purpose arena, what separates the Nation of Islam ideology from other religious groups is their rebuff of “afterlife,” and what they call “pie in the sky salvation.” The Nation of Islam adherents argue that there is no abstract heaven and hell or a “spook God.”³⁵ Instead, heaven and hell are here on earth and the devil is the white man who sows the seeds of discord between people. This notion is significant as good deeds, penance and other religious kinds of extortion do not function as comporting factors to Black peoples’ actions or inactions. There is only the promise of a good life in the present that members could enjoy in their current life by holding themselves accountable to the Islamic principles of fasting, charity, and righteousness. The consequences of not embracing these tenets are suspension from the group or the probability of engulfment from the chaos and immorality of the outside society. The Christian religion that many Blacks embraced as a result of enslavement and colonialism, at least as argued by NOI Muslims, asked Blacks to remain childlike and dependent on white benevolence, which could be given, withheld and taken arbitrarily. Women like Sister Vanceia X had doubts about the Christianity of which they had so willingly and unquestionably accepted as African tradition. Though the Nation of Islam theological ideology is complex and at times contradictory, what is clear is that this grass roots religion believed in the divinity of Black people and taught that it was those divine qualities that made them worthy of a better lot than they had historically experienced.³⁶

The Nation of Islam’s--- Sister Melvina

I was born Melvina Melton. My mother’s name was Wilma Mitchum, my father’s name was James Melton. I was born in 1930

on January 11th here in Philadelphia and I was raised in Philadelphia -- in fact I been in Philadelphia all my life. I spent maybe 40 years of my life in North Philly. Then I decided - after I got married for the second time -- to move up to West Oak Lane. Then I moved to Willow Grove. I lived in Willow Grove for a while, but my husband didn't like Willow Grove. He said it reminded him too much of his home Tampa, Florida. It wasn't...city enough for him. Well anyhow, I married in 1948 after I had graduated from high school. I married and got pregnant the next year which I had a baby in 1949. I was attempted [sic] to go back to evening school, at that time we had evening school just to take up some courses, but unfortunately that didn't really work for me. I just did not really have time.

The Search for Meaning

I was always very influenced by religion all my life . . . I actually joined the Christian religion for I guess about five years I was a Christian. I was always involved in church, but I wouldn't join.

But I was like inquisitive about religion. I followed the Holiness, the Episcopal, I just . . . would go around . . . Daddy . . . Grace etc. At that particular time he was pretty strong in impacting this city and also New York. I was a sympathizer in a lot of religions, but actually joining, no. But I did wind up joining Thankful Baptist Church. I would say in 1950 maybe. I wanted my daughter to be raised up under the influence of a spiritual backing and that was the closest church to me where I was living and that was two blocks away so I went there to join with her. But my mother didn't push the religion on us as children coming up. You know we wasn't obligated to go. Even though she might send us to Sunday School now and then or on Easter. You know that was traditional among our race - Easter Sunday if you didn't go no other time and New Years. Yeah, well mostly all black family would try to go to church on Easter because it supposed to been the rising of Jesus. New Years was the beginning of a New Year and they would go for prayer. Mostly all homes had black eye peas and greens and quite naturally the pork. That was just everywhere you went, everybody house you went in had black eye peas for money and greens was for dollars. Those are just rituals people have. Don't care whose home you went to they would have it and they never allowed a woman to enter their home on New Years Day first. You had to have a man before you could go into the average home. Black people was very superstitious about luck. So if a man went in first you supposed to have good luck for the year.

How I heard about NOI

Well anyhow, that was in about 1950 and I would say probably five years later my husband came home one evening all excited because a friend of his had told him about the Nation of Islam. Now, I was about 25. And he wanted me to stop whatever I was doing and listen to him about something that he says that it was the best thing happened at that time for him and he insist on me sitting down listening to him. I was reluctant. I didn't want to hear it. But I listened a little bit then I'd tell him you know I didn't have no interest in it and that might've went on for a year between him and I because he continued to go to the first mosque early in this city which was in the 1600 block of Baily Street and I still didn't want to hear about it. So that went on with him and I for a good year. I remember throwing a can of cleanser at him because he was provoking me about this here Islam and I had cooked some food. Oh, I cooked and took the pork out of the greens or whatever I had cooked and after he ate, I told him that's what I had did and we was getting ready to really fight me because I had cooked that pork and took it out and wait until he had eaten it and then told him. Oh, he was upset. Oh, yeah. He...really wanted to hurt me, I guess. (laughter) So, I mean that might have went on for a few more months, [arguing] I don't know. When I was twenty-six I finally decided I would go over and listen, but I wasn't going to join. Just to bring back some peace because it would sound so weird to me what he was telling me and I said I would just go just to make peace and that's where it started from. I went there in 1956. I didn't join until 1958. It wasn't that I didn't try to join. You couldn't just go in there and join. You had to write a letter and I started writing it when I was about...maybe 27, I guess, I don't know. Maybe I started 26 or 27. I started writing a letter I know it took maybe two years before it was passed. After a year or so, I got where I didn't care whether or not I got it because it was – at that time it was a secretary that would read your letter. You know you had to have a letter that was a standing letter. Everybody wrote this letter in order to receive your "X." You had to be an X to become a part of that religion, so if I didn't have a "T" crossed, if I didn't dot an "I" or if I didn't open up the "L," if I didn't make the "M" curve, this guy – this secretary, he would just mark off stuff constantly. Well, he didn't mark it. He didn't like give you the different grade level, but he just marked it and showed you all your mistakes and he kept doing that to me. He did it to me a little over a year. I learned later that it was so strenuous because --- to see of your sincerity, if you really wanted to be a Muslim and if so you would continue on until you reached that point. So, it was a good

test. I wasn't sincere right away may be it did help. I'm still there. So, I mean after I really got involved I never left.

Why I Joined

Really I was joining to take the pressure off of me. At that point. Everything was so strange to me when I went there, I was really like frightened. I really was frightened because when you enter, you see this blackboard and a man hanging off a tree and that just blew my mind, but I still went back because me being inquisitive and trying to find out, but in my heart it wasn't there. I don't know what it did to me, truthfully. I can't even remember what it did, but it was very weird. Comparing to Christianity, you know – and to walk into that. Then finally I did get my "X" in September 1958, but I still went to church on and off. I did not fully commit I would say, maybe until—about 1960 I think.

Reactions to Becoming A Muslim

The reactions to me becoming a Muslim-- Oh, it was hard, you know. People resent you. Well, they first think you're crazy. That's number one. You know, you change your dress attire and you're talking about your eating habits, you know and I can remember my father telling me, 'that how dare I say I'm not eating such and such and I was raised like...' — I always ate home. Then all of a sudden you're not going to eat because – I told them they got pork and you cooked in pork and it was very difficult. So, you know they labeled me as insane – a crazy person. No person came around or supported me, no, not for a long time. I would say for about 20 years – 15 to 20 years before... after about 15 years, one of my sisters joined, but she stayed in about five years and then she left. She said it was too strict. But, they came around to support later even though they didn't join. If I needed them for emergency or anything of that nature, you know . . . we was a close knitted family sort of, but they wasn't too particular about me attending a lot of their functions. Because you bring about a air when you come in there. You dress different. Eat different. Then they know you have all these different – I don't do this and I do that, you know and that put's a block. It does something to people and you know that they got to try to – out of respect try to respect whatever your belief. And I realized that, so I never like to put people in those type of predicaments . . . You know, make them feel uncomfortable. So I didn't care whether or not I went around them or not. That's how I got.

Importance of Nation

The Nation was family. Yeah, I think that back then the unity and the love was all together different than today. I think it was a more sincere type of unity back then. When they said they like you and want to be with you and help you and show – they showed it, so the unity was different than what it is today. It started to change after Wallace D. Muhammad converted it into Sunni Muslims. I think because it [unity] was like a demand from him (Elijah Muhammad). I'm just saying that. He insist on us caring for one another and that's a natural thing, you know. And you have to have somebody on your neck telling you, you should be caring, you don't always feel it yourself. Some things just actually bothered me because it seemed like it should be natural, but if somebody got to tell you! But, never the less, I never left and I enjoyed being there and I always was outspoken to a degree. You know, I expressed myself. Maybe not the way I would like to, but I really expressed myself and I think that's good for you if you can express yourself. You feel more comfortable and that'll make you- you could tolerate more. We were encouraged to question but to also follow the leadership. I personally never felt like a second class citizen and never heard it said. I heard more of that in this new group [referring to under so-called orthodox Islam]. Out of the first part before transition the womens were respected by mens a lot. I think more respected back then than they are today and I think because a lot of the brothers back there didn't want their wives to work, you know and they just wanted them to be home and rear their children and do their cleaning and keep the home together etc. You had a choice. Most women did not have a problem with that, welcomed it really.

But what happened, later on as time went on, you heard of different women speaking about their career. You wanted to advance – because I remember my daughter who was in and she left when she was about 17 because she wanted her career not really a family. Not getting off of what you were saying, but she was working at Temple College and she said she had to go for a secretary lunch meeting or something it was, but her boss was Caucasian and she said they was going to go somewhere close by . . . and sure enough she saw two Muslims and they reported her. Yes, they did. (laughter) Some women did pursue their career. They just went on and pursued whatever was in their heart and what they wanted to be, and they felt like they could bring it back to the religion and I had them to tell me that. They did both but some did not.

Why Other Women Joined

I think a lot of brothers bought women in. Sometimes I just have general conversations just for my inquisitiveness... – I'm an inquisitive type person because I wanted to know what made you join. What made you come in? And a lot of them will tell me they met brothers. I will tell you many of them met brothers. And they promised to marry them or something like that. (laughter). Because at that time, they were doing what you call fishing. You ever heard of that? Well, they was fishing a lot of them [women] too. I had bought women too, but they never joined. It's always been the clothes with the women I know of. It's always the clothes. Well you know we were in two uniforms. You remember them?: Yes, we were in uniforms in the '70s. And we had a color for everyday. Now, I think, originally, we started that in this city, the different colors. And everybody didn't like them uniforms, but they looked good on a lot of them. And I had a lot of respect. If I get on the bus, people got up, move out way and let me sit down and all that. So the uniforms did bring about for the women — that dignity. We did the coloring, but the uniforms came from Chicago. We came about with different colors. The white came from Chicago that we know. Because when we had our Saviors' Day, everybody was in white if you was a Muslim. It was one of the most beautiful sights you want to see. Beautiful! I really don't know who designed them, but they were beautiful. So clothes were the barrier for the women. And the men, they had their uniforms too. They looked very distinguished. And oh self pride. It done something to you the clothes? Mhmm, yes.

Final Thoughts

If you wanted to be a Muslim the Nation of Islam was where it was. I put a lot of work into the Nation--Truthfully. It's good and it's not good. When I got 62, I think, and I went to sign up for social security. That's a clue right there. Because I had nothing hardly in it because I had gave up like 20 years or more just working for no social security. They didn't take it. So I had nothing to fall back on. So that helped to wake me up also. (laughter) But, I don't regret it. That was an experience for me which I enjoyed and I always been an outreach person, period!

My most memorable time in the Nation was Saviours' Day--Every 26th, I was on a plane going. And I did it for 20 something years. And if I wasn't in a plane, I was in a car. Just being around all the believers? The energy. Coming together from all over and that you didn't see the sisters since the last Saviors' Day and all that from

different states and you know, the excitement, you know. Even though you tell each other every year, "All right, I'll call you during the year!" and you never do it. But you know if you live, the next Saviors' Day, you'll probably see them again. Many, many, many years, I had happiness with that. I enjoyed that. I would do it again.

The Political Factor

The use of religion as a political act has been present throughout African American history. For example, slaves who were barred from places of worship constructed their own. Nat Turner was said to have been called by God to liberate his people, and even David Walker's theological exhortations spoke of the use of religion to both empower and prohibit freedom.³⁷ Islam was a banner of liberation for Blacks according to Blyden.³⁸ For women who joined the Nation of Islam in search of both spiritual and political answers, the Nation presented a ready and ideal vessel as it made the spiritual foremost political. The Nation presented Islam as a way of life—nothing operates outside that notion.

The very fact that Black Muslim women embraced a different brand of religion equipped with new-fangled culture such as diet, manner of prayer, language, and style of dress as compared to their traditional religious lifestyles, particularly during the 1940s and 1950s, when the great majority of not only the Black community but the wider society was Christian, is a bold political act. It clearly demonstrates, amid talk of complacency and passivity, the heightened agency of which these women, who chose to convert and eventually remain in the Nation of Islam, are operating. Moreover, historian, Victoria W. Wolcott, went so far as to aver that in defense of family and community, "the women who . . . joined the Nation of Islam practiced a masculine style of self-defense."³⁹ As a

result, religion and politics appears to be co-factors for women both accepting and remaining in the community.

Nation of Islam's---Sister Dela

My name is Sister Dela Shabazz. I was raised in Philadelphia, although I was born in Suffield, Connecticut. I have four brothers and now three sisters, one deceased. We were a big family, happy family, four boys and four girls. I was born in, on March the 14th, 1937. My father[was] a Baptist minister and my mother very active in the church, one of the women who helped form the ministers' wives association in Philadelphia. My father's church was the Dauphin Street Baptist Church. On Dauphin Street, North Philly.

How I heard about the Nation

[After high school] I took courses but I didn't go to college because as I was coming out of high school, I heard Islam. We all hung out in a group. It was a group of guys and gals, you know, we just hung out. We loved to dance and we did different things together. But this new guy came on the scene and he was a talker. I mean, he was a talker. And I'm looking at all my friends, they're so in awe, and I'm saying who is this? What's happening here, you know. And he just kept talking and I would ignore him and of course, that attracted him, you know, so he tried all the more. And all my friends just thought I was crazy. So we ended up going together, okay. And I started listening to what he was saying and it was really how I was feeling, you know. Well, while I was hearing that, you know, I went to my father and telling him what I was hearing that was in the Bible and the Muslims knew, the black Muslims, or whatever they're called, the Nation of Islam knew more about the Bible than he did. While I was in church, what really got me is when you couldn't question God. You know, and when you're young, you're full of questions. And I didn't understand until later that they just don't have the answers if you don't really study. And [still] then after you study, you really don't know the answers just more questions. But Islam has taught me to appreciate Christianity much more because of the understanding I have gained and the fact that every major change, you know, or every change or all religions come from God. So you know, you get out of that you're this and everybody has to be this or they're not right. I appreciated that. The family was not happy about the questions I was asking so, we were taught let there be peace. You know, so I soon moved out of the house. The peace, you know, I'm living under my father's roof and I'm not agreeing with him. And, in those days, we were radical [the

Muslims]. We let everybody know how we felt. So it became uncomfortable. [This was] about early 1957. So, I just left, me and a girlfriend got an apartment. And we lived there. She happened to be Caucasian. I had not joined yet. But I had questions and I had met this guy and he was talking, so he used to come over to the house and every time we'd just have a big crowd just sitting around talking, you know. [My roommate and I], we had grown up together in the same neighborhood so she, she knew me, I knew her.

But when Islam started, I started looking at things differently at her differently. To show you just how different it was. Our people ate hot dogs and beans Saturday night. Her people ate hot dogs and sauerkraut. Hers was a dinner but mine wasn't. I thought that was so interesting, I can accept what she was fixing cuz we took turns cooking, but she couldn't accept what I was. So you know, again, you understand deeper how just our lifestyles [were so different]. Now, the first cussing I heard in the home was in her home. She had an older sister that would cuss her mother out and I was shocked. You know, because that didn't happen in my house. And you know, we always respected my parents, you fall out, you get mad and everything but oh, my goodness. Stand toe to toe with her? Uh uh. So those are the kinds of things that were happening, just little things that just, you know, we just started growing apart and apart, you know.

What Changed

I used to dance, I loved to dance. So this same guy invited some guys over to the house and he said, go ahead, show me how to dance. And I'm dancing, these guys are sitting there, watching me and I felt funny. These guys with bald heads, stern looking, not mean. I stopped dancing I felt very uncomfortable. They were just sitting there watching. So, this affected me and I decided to go to check it out, see where these guys were coming from. When I finally went and I saw them there, I said well, my goodness, you know, there are so many dos and don'ts. That kinda introduction affected me. So, and in the early days, I think the nation was protective, too. So when I was coming in, they were sort of protective of me and shuffling this guy [the one who talked all the time] around. You know, because he had been around them for a long period of time and he had never come in. You know, so when I heard it and I knew where he was getting his information from, well, I joined. You know, so when I heard it [the message at the meeting] you know, I said this is it. This is it. But, the guy [who was

doing all the talking before] he didn't want me to join. He just brought me there because I insisted.

I believe Islam first came to the downtrodden, you know. When I came in, I might've been one of the first person that came we'll just say middle class, just a different scale than I'm accustomed to. I had to get accustomed to all these people. You know, and Islam helped me with that. Well, see, I received my "X" about the end of 1957. [When I joined] the women were wonderful. You know, they rallied around you. They helped you and everything. It was never overwhelming. It was just different. I was for it, you know. You know, I didn't have any second thoughts or regrets because I talked about it so much, you know, before I joined. I think I was ready for a change. You know, because it just fit me so well. I did not have to worry about my friends or what they other people outside my family thought, you know. Many of my friends I had no problem with as you get out of high school you just go off in different areas eventually any way. My family didn't understand me they probably thought I was just going through something. You know, my mother and my father were both raised in the South so my mother's from Albany, Georgia and my father's from Alabama. And the FBI, after I left home, the FBI used to come to my house, to their house looking for me. And every week they would come. And my mother was a wreck. You know, she was so frightened. She didn't know what I had gotten into. You know, and oh, I have to stop, you know, but I said, Mother, just tell them that I do not live there. I said and tell them please, do not come back here looking for me. You know, because if they really want me, they can reach me. I'm not hiding. You know, and she was afraid to tell them that. So finally, it got so nerve wracking for her, she got up the nerve to say it and they never came back. It's the intimidation because they scared her she tried to convince me to leave the Nation. I'm still the only Muslim.

The Search for Meaning

My brother next to me, he was listening came out some time but he married a girl whose brother was a Muslim from the Middle East where the women walk behind the men and he could do anything and she can't do nothing. She had to ask permission, all that. You know, so although he, he kept the dietary laws he never came in and to this day, he has had good health throughout his life. I invited everybody to join because that was the name of it, you know, but fear, you know, and at that time, I think you actually had to have fallen so low, you had no place to go or it was just your time for a change. I was searching for something other than what I had,

Christianity. I was searching. I've been to Catholic church, couldn't understand what was being said so that didn't attract me. 7th Day Adventist when I was coming up at the same time that we were coming up and something about them, I couldn't quite understand, you know, so I left there. But I was just open to different things because I guess I was searching, you know. So Islam, or the Nation of Islam won out because it was concerned with the people. It cleaned them up, you know. It got them to work together. We took our nickels and dimes and built an empire, you know. In Chicago, you know, you're exposed to all kinda different people. You know, so it was a growing thing. And I really didn't worry so much about college I was just so excited about building the Nation. So, once I was in you know I never left and I was never suspended. Never left! You know.

Why Others Joined

The people who joined in the 40s and early 50s they were trying to change, you know someone was taking an interest in them to get back into society and clean themselves up. So you had that group, okay. Then the brothers dressing in suits, opening doors, helping, oh, my goodness, we weren't accustomed to that. They [the men] weren't accustomed to that, I'll put it that way. So this attracted a lot of people. In fact, my mother and I fell out a little bit because if I took--- I have two children, when I took them over to the house, she would feed them pork after I said do not feed them pork but she didn't see anything wrong with it. It wasn't until my children were big, bigger, I'll say that, because they were real small, and my son would open the door, yes, ma'am, no, ma'am. My daughter would do the same thing. And that impressed her. She said the religion can't be that bad if this is what it produces. So we were on speaking terms again, you know. People saw the change in people that they knew or that was close to them and they liked it. But it didn't push them to join, but they liked what it was doing for other people. Too strict for some. But some came, you know. Yeah, some did come, you know they were serious. That's how we grew so fast. Okay, and when you grow so fast, people came in for different reasons. Some came in because they saw a gravy train. This was the late 1960s. See, the larger you get, and again, like the situation in New York when one of our brothers were beaten and Malcolm came out and, and we all dispersed and the cops said, the chief said, that man got too much power. See, now you're scaring the outer world. You see, because they're not accustomed to black people sticking together for anything. And here were all of us, because the call went out, and all of us converged on New York---from Philadelphia, New Jersey, we came from all over, and

all we did was walked around. You know, but we didn't let anybody cross our lines and the brothers were on the outside and the sisters were on the inside. We were there to give our lives. The same thing happen coming down Georgia. Klu Klux Klan said Elijah Muhammad better not come down here. A lot of people weren't gonna make it and including myself because I was pregnant. How dare you? We came on down. You know, and what they did, they changed the venue to a smaller place so the majority of us couldn't get in. You know, we had this little place that we decided, the Muslims wouldn't come in and let the visitors come in. Just the visitors. But riding back to the house that we stayed in, you could hear the speech all over the city, all over the area. You know, and again, we were in a cab, because everybody in the black neighborhood had it on. You see, so that was impressive to me. It was that kind of message that attracted people.

But, see, we came in different--first you have fear, too, so the ones at the lowest, they've been all the way down. What do they fear now-- you see what I'm saying? But the next group, you know, they see all this movement. They see the manners. The progress when nobody helped us, you know, so more people started coming. You know, and everybody can't be pioneers. You know, but they can come later and carry it, you know, wherever they are. So, I think that was the case, you know the brothers were so dignified and so persistent and try so hard to help that that attracted women, too.

The Attire

Women, we were stylists. We had to make clothes that fit us for us, cuz we were wearing long clothes when the world was wearing minis, right? So we were fashion divas. You know, and these things, we had to do for ourselves. Every people look out for themselves in this manner, you know. So we have to do that because now we're getting clothes that I think they fit Chinese or something. You know, they don't fit us. You know, and it's very difficult to find things. And what the society did when we started wearing long clothes, they came out with long clothes. You know, so to attract us to start buying from them because we weren't buying from them, and as soon as we bought into them, then they changed it. And the leaders of their fashion world are funny men, you know. So there comes a time where you have to really understand that you have to do for yourself. Everything that you need, you have to do for self and you have to instill that in children as they grow up. So that they won't be afraid to do for self. And that's everything—start a business... start a school, you know. You have to do that. My mother was an expert seamstress. And I never

took an interest in it. Can you imagine that? I had no interest in it. But when I joined the Nation of Islam I learned in the MGT (laughter).

Uniforms were the women idea. See, out of Chicago, you know, the color, see, everything came out of Chicago. That was the head, our headquarters. So the colors and everything came out of Chicago. At first we had someone making them but eventually we had a factory. Made out of Chicago you know, and then it changed. We had the baddest pant skirt in the world. Oh, it was sooo sharp. When you look at it, it looked like a skirt but they were pants you know, with the long jacket. You know the sisters designed that? Yeah, so we, we did everything, you know, everything we needed, we did. You know, it wasn't all done in whatever city you were in because some places were smaller than others. So everything came out of Chicago, headquarters. So everything went into Chicago and everything came out of Chicago. You know, so we were taught how to sew, cook, how to rear your children. You know, even if we didn't have a good understanding of the language, English, you know, we would get help that way, you know. Among ourselves. Always among ourselves. Read and discussed issues, books etc. Most of our literature was what Elijah Muhammad wrote. Women who had many children were seen as experts and shared their expertise.

Well, I think we [meaning women] were encouraged to take care of the family. You know, and you know, just like everything else, there's times for different things and there's time change, you know, when your children are old enough, you know, you could do other things, more freely, than you could when they were small. You know, so... we kept busy. Some of us were scholars, you know, so every field that we had among us, we went in to. You know, whatever we needed in the community, you know, we could get that information. Just inner, if you came in, you got the benefits. If you didn't come in, you didn't. We were learning ourselves but we would try to help other people also. That, you know, you meet along the way. We always tried to do better. Just like the school, we needed a school, you know, so we started our own schools because we needed it to give the children a better chance. So we had educated people coming in, you know. We had many educated people coming in.

The Work

I was a lieutenant, I was a captain and a secretary. You did what was needed. Everyone pitched in where needed. I was given the

position because I voiced that I wanted to help more. I think it started with the fact that I wanted to help. You know, I wanted to help. And also, the willingness to learn, you know. My mind was never set so much in regiment that I couldn't try to see the whole picture. You know, and we very were regimented in the first. The criteria that is used to select women for certain positions in the Nation of Islam was the same for men and women. First, you show what you, you know, you show what, what your interest, you show your interest in wanting to help. You know, and then you might be whatever your, you know, if you like to talk to people, you might become an investigator, you know. So I would assume that, you know, the captains were put in place because they had an ability to deal with the sisters and teach the sisters and sisters would listen. And then they would get lieutenants who had the same qualities, you know. And then also happy in your work, you know, that went a long way. The highest position a woman could hold in the Nation was Supreme Captain. You know, that's an official role, you know. Prestigious role. The others, the teachers, you know, a teacher is an honored role because you're teaching people. You know, but the captain had the power because here comes the captain. I was captain for about three years. I became a lieutenant when I first walked in because I was gung ho. I liked it, you know. And you know, I could follow instructions and I could get the sisters to come along, you know, and then all that is training, too. If you were an investigator you investigated. You know, you know, now, some of the things I've heard, God is merciful. I have never been in a situation but I've heard about later. It never happen to me but I heard how they go in your house and see if you're clean or dirty, you know Inspectors were to teach them how to keep keep clean. The investigators, if you came up with, did something against any of the laws, the investigator would investigate. Yeah, but the house, you know, you have to be clean. You know, and they would inspect you, you know. So that's what made us more conscious more serious. So, we were a people trying to establish what we needed for ourselves you know. Everybody was not as clean. Okay. So you're trying to get everybody to be clean. And there are reasons for it, you know. So the whole thing is to, everybody to come up, you know. And that's why you had to have people to investigate if a crime was committed, you had it investigated and you had to be judged, you know, and what not and sentenced. You have to, you know, do the, do the time, you know. As captain you report to supreme captain who was put in place by Elijah Muhammad. Iman W.D. Muhammad appointed me captain. And the honorable Elijah Muhammad would call the ministers and cabinets and secretaries into Chicago for meetings and what not.

Impact of Nation

I think the Nation of Islam was most impressive. The first group of blacks that came out of bad situation, forced themselves together, made something of themselves, produced for their own selves. You know, and if it kept on like that, white people wouldn't be over us. They hated that. But again, everybody didn't believe, everybody didn't believe. So we were constantly, you know, the police would constantly watch us. That's so good about telling the truth, you don't have to worry about nothing. And they say, you know, and so then, they would be the one that trumping up things, you know. So it impressed on African Americans that you can do something for yourself. Which are little nickels and dimes did. You know, put it together, you can produce for yourself. You can be anything you want to be. You know, you just have to strike out and work for it. You don't have to hold your head and scratch it and shuck, you know, and we showed complete fearlessness. We had a lot of great people, you know, but they tried to wedge a division between Malcolm and Elijah Muhammad, but Malcolm always followed Elijah Muhammad. And the time he didn't, he got chastised but he was welcomed back, you know. Now, everybody was not as forgiving as the honorable Elijah Muhammad. You see. So, you know, and even Imam W.D. Muhammad, when he was teaching, he got put out of the Nation. You see. No one was untouchable.

Women's Group

The MGT and the Vanguard they were leaders. Oh, my, they were the leaders. Oh, my goodness. My daughter by me being MGT working in the community she was at the meetings all the time. So she was taught everything MGT was taught, okay. So when the vanguard started, these are the girls that were better than, you know, see, because MGT is the whole family--- Vanguard were the best. You know, but the vanguards were the young sisters that could step, that could march, disciplined. They were strong You know, that could just persevere and she loved it. This sister came into the community because my daughter, when she was about six years old, you know, you come in, you get searched and you have a conversation, they pick up anything on your breath. You know, my daughter could do that when visitors came to the meetings and that impressed this school teacher so much, she came in the community because of that. That's right. She didn't know she was doing all that [my daughter]. But we moved to Philadelphia and she was younger than what the vanguard, the age they took in the

vanguard. I don't know, I would assume 14-18. You know, the young people. And she was under that age. And she kept worrying the captain to let her be in there. Let her be in there, and they let her in. Because she could do everything that they trained to do. And of course, also they were trained to defend. She could do everything they could do. Them young ones, they got there and gone they were good. But also it gave them something to do. They were a part of it. So she talks about it now, how she trained, how she enjoyed it and she went on and she loved fashion so she was in fashion. You know. She helped our community with the fashion because she wanted them to show how we wore clothes in a modest manner. If you don't really concentrate on modesty, you'll get just like everybody else. Walking that runway, twitching and carrying on. So, see, you had the younger people coming up. See, at that time, you're capturing all this energy, you know. So from an early age, they knew responsibility. The boys see, they were gonna make a better husband. You know, and father. You know, because they understood from birth, you have a responsibility. You have to take care of women, provide for them. But we lost a lot.

Final Thoughts

I never joined the Panthers or any other group. They heard the religion but Elijah Muhammad was moving too slow for them. So you see what happened to them. Because you can't fight this man with power. You know, you don't have no factories. You run out of bullets you have, what? You gotta go get your guns. You know, so. So it really didn't make sense but they were young. I have never desired anything outside than what I was getting there [the Nation of Islam]. As long as I made the changes. But no, I never wanted to leave the community you know. Never. I never left. Never suspended.

The Message Factor

I charge the white man with being the greatest liar on earth.

I charge the white man with being the greatest drunkard on earth,

I charge the white man with being the greatest swine-eater on earth, yet the Bible forbids it.

I charge the white man with being the greatest gambler on earth.

I charge the white man, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, with being the greatest murderer on earth.

I charge the white man with being the greatest peace-breaker on earth.

I charge the white man with being the greatest adulterer on earth.

I charge the white man with being the greatest robber on earth.

I charge the white man with being the greatest deceiver on earth.
I charge the white man with being the greatest troublemaker on earth. So, therefore ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I ask you, bring back a verdict of guilty, as charged.⁴⁰

The NOI messages were at times or in combination harsh, accurate, alluring, militant, outlandish, political and rebellious.⁴¹ For Sister Dela, and women like her, the allure of the Nation was rooted in its political message that had serious implications for individuals searching for purpose and trying to understand white supremacy and its impact on Black people in all its forms. From outsiders, Muslim women were seen as serious, kind, happy and, above all else respected according to Nation women.⁴² Some women who heard the message were drawn to it because this perception of women and their apparent radicalism, while others responded to the questioning of longstanding religious doctrine. Perhaps, as the Nation so boldly announced, Black people had really been duped, and Islam as a religion of freedom was Black people's natural religion and path to knowledge of self-liberation, and gender equality.

Through its message, the Nation of Islam indicted whites in America and Blacks joined as witnesses to the past and current atrocities committed against them. As the Nation charged the white man for his crimes, more Blacks enlisted tired of their victimhood as firsthand recipients of white supremacy's violence and hatred. The Nation message was inviting to women, attracting them with messages of protection and security, money and friendships in all walks of life. However, issues of security were not only reserved for the woman. Men were also promised defense from white hegemony, opportunities for employment, physical protection, good family life and respect. The Nation, unlike mainstream

society, viewed Black men most capable of being responsible and serious, financially, intellectually and spiritually.

Protection, Security and Male Factor

Until we learn to love and protect our woman, we will never be a fit and recognized people on the earth. The white people here among you will never recognize you until you protect your woman. The brown man will never recognize you until you protect your woman. The yellow man will never recognize you until you protect your woman. The white man will never recognize you until you protect your woman. You and I may go to Harvard, we may go to York of England, or go to Al Ahzar in Cairo and get degrees from all of these great seats of learning. But we will never be recognized until we recognize our women.⁴³

On visiting with a couple of my sons in what they call the Near East, in 1959, I began in Turkey. We traveled from Turkey down to Africa to Ethiopia and the Sudan. We visited Arabia (Mecca and Medina), and we visited Pakistan. We returned home from Lahore, Pakistan, on or about the 6th of January, 1960. We didn't even find on that entire tour such a thing as not recognizing the black woman. Everywhere we went, the Black man recognized his woman. He had great respect for her.⁴⁴

My beloved brothers in America, you have lost the respect for your woman and therefore you have lost the respect for yourself. You won't protect her; therefore you can't protect yourself. She is your first nurse. She is your teacher. Your first lesson comes from your mother. If you don't protect your mother, how do you think you look in the eyes of other fellow human beings?⁴⁵

It was the Nation's assertion of protection and the credo for Black Muslims to know both themselves and their enemy that attracted followers.⁴⁶ Black people, most especially Black women, have lived in fear of physical violence for much of their time in the United States—fear of rape, abuse, even death preoccupied many of their thoughts.⁴⁷ In addition, poverty and the threat of economic hardship dominated their lives especially in the early years of the community as it emerged during the depression era. Black women were

employed in some of the most undesirable jobs, like the stereotypical domestic, which consistently put them in danger of harassment or molestation by whites.⁴⁸ Consequently, Muslim women found great comfort in the message of protection and respect and deliverance from domestic work for whites, espoused by Elijah Muhammad.⁴⁹

However, Ula Yvette Taylor, and other scholars, challenged the Nation's claims of protection and respect for women, suggesting that this was simply masked, disingenuous, and patriarchal sentiment.⁵⁰ Paulette Pierce and Brackett Williams appear to agree with Taylor stating that these assertions were "a chauvinist helping hand through the double-revolving doors of racial and economic tyranny."⁵¹ My research, however, reveals that perhaps Taylor's, Pierce's and Brackett's critiques of the Nation of Islam are possibly projections based solely on the previous research offered on the experiences of Black women's encounters in the church and Black nationalist organizations onto Black Muslim women as they clearly lack important sources to support such conclusions.⁵² As evidenced in the narratives and primary sources of Muslim women who joined the Nation of Islam from 1945 to 1975, as well as available Nation records, it seems probable that Black women were not victims of a sexist regime within the Nation but instead they were highly regarded and held positions of esteem, and were very much involved in the daily operations of the community, holding equal or even greater positions at times than their male counterparts.⁵³ In fact, I would argue, that it is the very ideology espoused by the Nation with regards to women that created a real and substantial currency of

power and privilege on which many Black women members could and did draw to their benefit.⁵⁴ In a manner similar to the way patriarchy confers advantage on, and is used by men in broader society, this use of “gender capital” by Black women in the Nation imbued women from the Nation with a nobility and power inside the community other women outside of this experience generally lacked, but not to the detriment of men. Nation women’s gender capital was embodied in the elevation of traditional female roles and the provision of women with opportunities for leadership in the Nation that in other communities were almost exclusively reserved for men.⁵⁵ Indeed men and women were empowered and capable of defending themselves, and did. When “the call was given” in defense of the Nation, both men and women mobilized:

When he [Malcolm X] went to um, New York, I think somebody, they beat, the police had beat on one of their brothers, you know that picture you see you about Malcolm X? I was there. I was there because uh, they called Jersey, New York, uh, New York brothers there, Jersey and Philadelphia came, people from all over. When you hurt some of our people, we all came. I was there when the police captain told us to leave after whatever, nobody moved until Malcolm told us to move.⁵⁶

See, the larger you get, and again, like the situation in New York when one of our brothers were beaten and Malcolm came out and, and we all dispersed and the cops said, the chief said, that man got too much power. See, now you’re scaring the outer world. You see, because they’re not accustomed to black people sticking together for anything. And here were all of us, because the call went out, and all of us converged on New York--from Philadelphia, New Jersey, we came from all over, and all we did was walked around. You know, but we didn’t let anybody cross our lines and the brothers were on the outside and the sisters were on the inside. We were there to give our lives.⁵⁷

Though men were to be out front in the protection of the community, women were also “called to arms.” Within the Nation men took great pride in the

strength and leadership capability of Muslim women, believing that they carried themselves in the most honorable and superior of manners, avoiding inflammatory language, dressing in a civilized and modest manner, displayed confidence, strength and ability in stark contrast to other women perhaps of any race.⁵⁸ In the interviews conducted by the researcher, Nation women spoke about non-Nation men who showed them the greatest level of respect, making sure they watched their language in their presence and demonstrating a kind of courtesy they had not before experienced, moving out of their way, giving up their seats, minding their manners; under no circumstances was the solicitation or harassment of Muslim women tolerated.⁵⁹ Though arguably some of the respectful behavior exhibited by non-Muslim men towards Nation women was inspired by an abiding fear of the Nation's men, perhaps it was also an equally abiding admiration and desire for these majestic women.⁶⁰ Yet women like their Muslim copartners were trained and ready to give their lives for the Nation. Sonsyrea Tate discussed in her autobiography how Nation women and men are trained to defend themselves to the death. If a Muslim woman or man was accosted by an outsider, he was almost guaranteed to pay physically.⁶¹

In the Nation of Islam women had choices. Those who desired to be wives and mothers could also work outside the home or contribute to the development of Nation programs like the M.G.T., the University of Islam or the other major businesses within the community. Working a full time job was typically negotiated between husbands and wives and on a case by case basis. The Nation did not prevent women from working as it employed a great number of them. While the

Nation doctrine did emphasize that the man must be the financial provider for the family, women could contribute even though it was not necessarily their primary responsibility. The Nation included a range of women in this regard. Some never married or had children, but nonetheless devoted their time and energy to supporting the Nation's efforts.⁶² Surprisingly, the Nation did not disparage one role for a woman over another—there was wide opportunity to contribute in some way chiefly in roles that did not degrade them such as the historic role as a domestic for white women. Nation women could actualize success both inside and out of traditional roles, and did so successfully.

At the same time, it is quite possible that marriage or the promise of marriage played a pivotal role in attracting some women to the Nation of Islam.⁶³ If a woman desired to marry a “good” man and to be assured economic and physical security, it was believed she would undoubtedly find it in a newly converted young Muslim man.⁶⁴ Still women's gender capital was not confined solely to their potential quality as wives and mothers—many held political influence through more formalized positions they secured at the local Temples or national headquarters. Women only and men only meetings occurred simply with situations that involved the F.O.I. or M.G.T. and some social outings, but otherwise women were involved, consulted and actively recruited for leadership in critical activities concerning the wider Nation community.⁶⁵

The Nation of Islam's---Sister Intisar

My name is Intisar Shareef. It's a name that was given to me by Elijah Muhammad. It's not my birth name. My parents named me Sheila. My family name was Wilson. I was married to a Woodruff so I've gone from Sheila Wilson to Sheila Wilson Woodruff to Intisar

Shareef. And I think I received my name from Elijah Muhammad in maybe 1973 or '74. It was before he passed. So I've had this name longer than any other name. And here in California, no one knows me by anything other than Intisar Shareef. I, you know, I changed my name on my passport so it's become my legal name. I was born in East Orange, New Jersey, in 1946, October 29, 1946. At that point, my parents were living in Newark, New Jersey. When I was 9 years old, they moved from Newark to East Orange in an attempt to get a better house and have a better lifestyle and so forth.

I had always been a good student so I continued to do well in school but now I could party on Saturday night. So it was a, it was a good point in my life. I did not, I did not know that much about making choices for college because both my parents were factory workers. My father was a, what they call a chemical technician. At the time, he worked for a company called Nobco Chemical Company in Bayon, New Jersey, I think. And he had worked there for 40 years, or worked there for over 40 years. And my mother worked at Hazel Bishop Cosmetic Company and my mother had been a stay-at-home mom for most of my life. She went to work when my older brother was going to college because she had to make money to pay for his college tuition. So fortunately for most of my life, my mother was at home when I would come home for lunch and so forth. But I had a younger brother and a younger sister and an older brother and I remember my younger sister really being--my younger sister being raised differently than the rest of us because she had to go to some kind of care, like maybe somebody's family daycare or they didn't, it wasn't like a childcare center but she wasn't at home with my mother the way the rest of us were. And I think that had a significant impact on my sister's sense of self, security, etc., etc. And again, in retrospect, I see the impact of moms not being able to be with their kids, you know. It's not a good situation for a lot of children. Some children fare better than others. But when it came to me making a choice to go to college, I did not have a lot of information. I hadn't thought about it a lot. My parents weren't involved in that process . . . So, I mean, back then, people would say what are you gonna be, a teacher or a nurse? You know, and I knew I wasn't gonna be a nurse. That was not an option for me. And I had been told all my life that I was bossy and I should be somebody's teacher so that fit perfectly and that's where I went. You know, my girlfriends, I had two good friends who were in, who were in high school with me and we all went to the same college. We all went to Trenton State. So I went to Trenton State, I spent four years there. I studied to be a teacher. I got my degree and I met, and I stayed in Trenton, New Jersey after I graduated.

You know, Trenton is only an hour ride from where I was living anyway, but I stayed down there because it was my time to, you know, emancipate, so to speak, from my family. So my parents had bought me a car and I stayed in Trenton. I was already living in an apartment with my roommates and I met my future husband. And so I got married and we, we, did we stay in Trenton? We, no, I got, I got married and then I moved back to East Orange with my, my then husband and I got, and went into a master's degree program. Cuz that was 1969, and there was a program, there was a lot of, you know, what do they call those? You know, programs to help minorities. Cuz this was, you know, the era of trying to equalize and bring us up and make things better so there were a lot of sort of compensatory programs to help minorities get their advanced degrees and I engaged in this program through Seton Hall University maybe. The Seton Hall wasn't the degree bearing institute. Newark State College was. So I ended up getting my master's from Newark State College which is now Keene College in New Jersey and I did my internship cuz I was, my degree is in guidance counseling, student personnel and guidance counseling and so I had to do an internship at Orange High School. I was a high school counselor there.

How I heard about the Nation

I had a friend who I'd gone to high school with who became very enamored with the Nation of Islam. He kept trying to get us to come to visit. He was in living in Philadelphia. And I'm thinking it was because of your father [referring to interviewer's father]. Because, because he was at . . . Let me get this straight, how this all happened. Because he [interviewer's father] was at Temple University as a student, I think. But I think he spent more time recruiting for the Nation than anything else. And my friend, Ernest Edwards, somehow crossed paths with Jeffries. What was your father's first name? ... Clifford --- Clifford. That's right. Somehow their paths crossed at Temple and your father was like a pit bull. Well, no, he was like a Chihuahua. Because he'd just keep nipping, nipping, nipping, nipping at your heels until he got you to do what he wanted you to do. And my friend Ernest, he was more like a, he was more like a Great Dane or something, in terms of his stature, his sense of self, his sense of power and knowledge. And we could not believe that, that, that he was being brought down like that. You know, in other words, he had to submit. So he ended up coming into the Nation and then he got on me and my ex-husband, he wasn't my ex then. Well, I wasn't, you know, I wasn't interested, period. I mean, I would do whatever my ex said to do basically. I was just a willing subject. So we came to Philly. Did we move to

Philly? I think we moved to Philly later, we moved to Hunter Street, cuz we really didn't have any real commitment to being in Jersey. I had finished this program. I had my, I didn't even know I had my degree. I thought I just, cuz I flunked one math class. The first time I ever got an F in my life because I just dropped the class and didn't go back. But then they told me if you wanted this degree, you're gonna have to make up the class so we came to Philly. I think we moved there, we had a little house on Hunter Street, a row house on Hunter Street. I enrolled in Temple University. I took the statistics course all over again and passed it with a C. And then I just basically forgot about the degree. I was like... it didn't matter. It didn't because by then, I had come into the Nation and got really involved. I started working and helping to recruit and build up the Nation.

Why I joined

Ok, my parents were Christian. I came in, I mean, I was baptized in the Baptist church. You know, but I wasn't strongly Christian otherwise, I don't think I would've came into the Nation. I mean, I wasn't strongly identified with the church. The church, my family has belonged to the same church forever. And when I go back to visit or if I'm, you know, for a funeral or whatever, I'm back at the same church. When, when I came into the Nation, I was empowered by the rhetoric and so I mean, any time any body'd take a picture of Jesus Christ and throw it down on the floor and stomp on it and they don't die, you know there's something to be said about what's going on here. So that's what caught my attention. These people gotta be either crazy or bold as I don't know what. And we were bold, okay. And not crazy but dismantling white supremacy. Elijah Muhammad to me was the first person who talked about white supremacy and gave me an analysis for it and a framework for understanding it and for critiquing racism in this country. So I was really impressed with that, Okay. So his mind was like a steel trap. I mean, he was just a really fantastic self-made man and I had so much admiration for him. And for the people that he began to put in positions of power.

Family Reaction

My youngest brother and I both came into the Nation. My older brother too. My father and mother did come to a couple meetings but did not join. My father was not impressed with Warith D. Muhammad. He was impressed with Elijah Muhammad. He was not impressed with Warith. Cuz Warith Muhammad cussed. He felt like that's totally unacceptable. I never heard my mother and father

ever curse. But he was impressed with Elijah Muhammad, Yeah but not enough to join. You know, old school black people. First of all, he liked pork. Now, my mother stopped fixing pork. Threw away all the pots and everything. He thought she had gone crazy. Following these kids, these nappy headed kids. My mother and father eventually supported me because they saw, you know, but it was hard for them to understand. They knew that I was following my husband. But at a certain point, I claimed this for myself. I could not have done what I did if I did not have a sense of self. So at some point, you know, even though the first meeting we went to, he walked down to claim, you know, he was gonna sign and turned around and looked at me, what you doing, sitting there? Now, you're not supposed to force nobody to come into the Nation. He said, 'what you doing sitting there' and I was so embarrassed. I got up. I seriously, cuz I did not want to be called out in front of all these people. All I can remember is damn, don't I get a chance to think about this or whatever? But there I was, and I joined and I wrote that letter and I became a part because I wanted to be with him. Okay.

What Changed

My heart didn't really get in to it until Minister Jeremiah gave me the opportunity to be the captain. And, and my mother knew this and my mother saw. Once, once my husband and I became, we came in the Nation, you know how you talk about it all the time. I mean, it's a new way of life. So my sister, she was 15 when she joined, my younger sister, my younger brother, they were all in awe. I mean, Islam definitely is captivating and during that era, it was like the bomb. Okay. So we would come home, we'd be talking about it. But see, my mother, true to her character she saw that what we were doing was beneficial. Okay, she, she was not opposed to the benefits that accrued to us. We got, we were living very well. So you know, we were, we were accruing financial benefits from this experience, okay? Really. And I cannot deny the benefit of that because it set a foundation for me. My parents, as I told you, worked in factories. Were basically kinda poor people. So you know, we didn't have a lot of money. I got a college education and so forth but I never had a sense of what upper class life was like. And I'm not just saying that that's necessarily a good thing but I do like knowing. Okay. I do like knowing. I never traveled. I do like going. So this experience in the Nation opened avenues, vistas, possibilities for me that I would not have had, I don't think. Because I did not have the aspiration. I think I would've been satisfied to continue to be my little 6th grade teacher, whatever, whatever. But again, still, you know, I met, I met Muhammad Ali and Minister

Jeremiah said go get your passport so that you could go to Turkey with Muhammad Ali. He's gonna be fighting or something and he wants somebody to travel, you know, with him. That's how I ended up getting my passport. No, I did not go to Turkey with him but having this passport with my name on it gave me the option the next time another opportunity came along to go someplace, I had the passport, I was ready to go. So it was different things like that that in the larger scheme of things, they're a result of me being in this organization with people from all walks of life.

On Meeting the Messenger

You know I met Elijah Muhammad. I was so excited because as Captain I was in charge of raising all this money and I was able to take it to Chicago. So I was so excited I was speeding and I think I got stopped by a police officer. So I, I calmed myself down, drove very, you know, very carefully the rest of the way but I was so eager to get this money out of my hands and into his [Elijah Muhammad] hands. And I will never forget, he said to me, because when I got to the house, of course, some, you know, someone answers the door and one of the secretaries comes and I tell her I have the money and, you know, the hope is that I'm gonna be asked to stay for dinner which I was. And she asked me what was in the case and I told her what it was and how much it was so she, she acted like she wasn't impressed but I know she was. And she took the money and then she went and told him. So at the dinner table, he asked me, he said and he was very, you know, his speech was very clipped like, never was like just one full flowing sentence. He would stop. I don't know whether that was a result of the asthma or just his voice, you know, the way he spoke but his voice and the way he spoke was different than most people. And you had to listen carefully to what he was saying, okay. But he was also fully understood by everybody cuz we did listen so carefully because you could be wiped out in a word. Okay. So and I'd watched that as we sat at the table where he had dismissed people from their positions, you know, in a word. Yeah. Yeah. So I mean, some of the things that they say, you know, about him in terms of his power and his influence, it sounds almost mythical but it wasn't because he was the final say. And he held that authority. I don't think, I don't say he misused it but people would tell him stuff and he knew stuff. He didn't even have to leave that place where he lived. He just basically held up in that house cuz he didn't go that many places but people would report to him and tell him stuff and he had information. Cuz the day that I saw him dismiss some sisters they had no idea that he knew that they had violated some of the rules. They were really surprised. You know, cuz he knew what had been

going on because you know, there were people, eyes and ears all over the place. So I mean, that's what happened in the Nation. You got kicked out for breaking rules, right.

Nation Action and Policy

It was always 1 to 5, 5 being the, the maximum. I don't know of anyone who was ever put out on a permanent basis. But the worst thing, I mean, that would be the worst thing that could happen to somebody. To a certain, you know, to be, this was our salvation, our community, our, you know what I'm saying. This was our future. So to be told that you can't be a part of your family anymore for one to five, that was pretty damaging, devastating. So when, you know, and when it came to, now, now Jeremiah, based on reports that came to him, and him writing the reports to Chicago, and then him getting back from Elijah Muhammad whatever the disposition was, then him having whoever was charged or whatever come forward and then him dismissing them based on Elijah Muhammad's work, that was powerful, okay. But to sit in Chicago and have the laborers who were supposed to be the national leaders come to a table with Elijah Muhammad and he dismisses you personally that was huge.

Collective Work

So he asked me how did the sisters make the money. Did they make this money? Was this money a result of the sisters' working in unity? And I said yes, dear holy apostle, it was. And he said because I would rather that you bring me 25 cents that you all pulled together to make than \$100,000 that's not really what all the sisters did together, collectively. And I said but we did collectively and we did. You know, we did do it collectively. We had to drag some of the detractors kicking and screaming but you know, they felt proud in the final analysis when, you know, we got the accolades for all that work. And I would say 75% of the sisters were all involved, one way or the other.

And that's what he said, you know. Money, what he said, money, good homes and friendships in all walks of life. He never lied. He never lied. You know, even though we were young, he realized that the way that either we had been brought up or the experiences we had from the street enabled us to bring something of benefit which is why he had this eclectic group of all of these people. I mean, I'm sitting at the table. I know these brothers have been to prison for murder. Not because they were innocent. They were guilty. They had killed somebody. Okay, and I'm sitting at the table with them every morning. I'm like what would my mother and father think of

me? But guess what? They [nation followers] were committed at this point to doing what was needed for the Nation. The same sort of passion, whatever that had led them out there in the street to become as notorious as they were on the street, they were now bringing it here. And as long as they remained, I would say, out of trouble they could stay. So, so we learned how to get along with each other and we learned how to respect each other despite all of our differences. We all ended up at the same place. We all landed in the same place, following this leader. Okay. So we had a mutual respect for each other. But for me to sit at a table and listen to these brothers who have done despicable things, but in the moment I'm in with them . . . and I am going to respect them and work with them. And the end result was that we were able to do these wonderful things with these believers and, and have this sense of accomplishment as we watched our economic base grow, our schools grow, our mosque grow, the community benefit from these efforts and so forth. I mean, it was a tremendous time. I know that I would not have been able to do that singularly. I know that I would not have had this sense of accomplishment and pride and security about who I am as a person if I had worked any place else but the Nation of Islam. You understand?

Why I left

Things changed after 1975. And you know what, to be honest with you, the mosque lost some of its appeal to me when it became so highly influenced by Middle Easterners. Men taking second wives. So it alienated me from the place that I had identified with as a safe place for me. So I said, okay, you know, and that's when I decided I'm going, I am gonna get a divorce. I'm gonna get a divorce and as much as I care about this man, I would love to, you know, have this come out a different way. I need to do something to put an end to this because otherwise I'll be steeped in this and I've seen--- sisters steeped in it. Especially when these men start having babies by these other women. The only thing I could do was rescue myself.

I love Islam. And, and I think it's been a very liberating force in my life. I, I have tried in my mind and in, you know, whatever way I can to discern what I believe to be Islam from what I believe to be Arab culture. Okay. There's a difference between telling somebody about a ritual and then telling someone something that gives them the impression that they don't know something. So at that point, I said I'm sick of this. I'm sick of us sitting and listening to people who come over and tell us certain things and we act as though we can't question them that we don't know certain things and that is absolutely not true. So I, you know, I decided, okay, I'd had

enough. You know, I had enough. And then a lot of my friends who were going to the mosque in Oakland which was basically the mosque where the people who were in the Nation of Islam were now going, but you know, different Middle Eastern people started coming to our mosque but a lot of, of the African Americans started going to other Middle Eastern mosques too. So the, the big core of us sorta broke up and went in different areas. So it wasn't the same anymore.

On the Status of Women

Well, I felt, I think that most women in the Nation might've even felt superior to men. Because I think that a lot of them, a lot of us looked at our accomplishments and what we were doing in terms of our families and what we were doing in terms of the mosque and realized that we were the backbone in many instances to what was going on in the mosque and certainly in terms of our families. So I don't think women were or felt inferior to men. I think that we did a good job of putting on those clothes and covering up ourselves and looking and acting a certain way. But I think there was agreement amongst us that we were not second class to anybody. We really felt superior. I think that that was challenged and perhaps undermined with this rise of polygamy, okay. I think Elijah Muhammad did a very good job of keeping us out of that quagmire while he was alive. And I don't think his son was as wise as his father in that respect. So I think sisters became, if I use myself as an example, undermined and attacked by brothers who did sense that we had a sense of, you know, strength that maybe they later resented. I don't know. But I think some of this desire that they had to have another wife was out a certain greed or desire or whatever that they had. That was basically immature, you know what I mean? So, but in retrospect, I don't think any, you know, while individually sisters may have been decimated by that, collectively, the whole community was decimated by that. There is not enough that I can really identify with at the mosque the way it is right now.

The Benefits of Participation

Elijah Muhammad was the one who put me squarely in my experience and that's what I thank him for. I lived the benefits of this experience. Even after I experienced a sort of betrayal myself from my ex, it still didn't totally dismantle for me the benefits that I had received from the Nation. The liberation that I had received from the Nation in terms of how I think far outweigh my own personal desires for clarity or definitiveness. The Nation had people like your father [interviewers father], people just liked him because he was, he was a man of his word. He stood by what he

believed. You know, I mean, you don't run into people like that. You run into them every now and then but you know, it's not like a continuous flow of people like that in your life. And to have in one place as many people as we had with that kind of integrity, at that particular time, it was very rare. You know, I'm learning that now, having lived beyond that. That to have that many people with that kind of integrity, all committed to the same purpose, following one leader. It was a fascinating experience.

Final Thoughts

I cannot point out and say there was just one memorable experience but this is what I can say about memorable experiences. That standing up and speaking to an audience of thousands of people was a very memorable experience and I did it more than once. And I can't separate one from the other or tell you which one stands out because they all sorta merge. This is speaking to both men and women. Now, now, the most memorable, I think the most powerful and impactful and probably most memorable were the ones with just the sisters, okay. And in those instances, I may be speaking about looking out at an audience of 500 sometimes but knowing that I was totally in sync with these women. That I had just about everybody's attention and they were all affirming what I was saying. It's more than just a notion to have people on the same wavelength with you in terms of your thinking, you know, because I mean, sometimes you say do you all know what I, do you know what I mean? Do you know what I mean? You don't know that people actually are---you're communicating. But to know that not only was I communicating but that they were following what I was saying and being somewhat uplifted and inspired by what I was saying, that was really powerful.

I never left under Elijah Muhammad's leadership. I left after but I am still Muslim. I do not go to the mosque any more I go to church sometimes.⁶⁶

The "X" Factor

While Sister Intisar was clearly led reluctantly into the Nation of Islam she eventually was given and accepted a level of responsibility that placed her among some of the most important women of the group. Sister Intisar discusses her own process in coming into Islam on her own terms. Her experiences are much like other women who enlisted in the late 1960s, some leaving without

degrees in order to participate in what they saw as a greater mission. Still, others did finish school and brought those skills to the Nation in order to further its economic and educational agendas. While Intisar came in by way of her husband, some women were born into the religion or were very young when their parents accepted the teachings of Clara and Elijah Muhammad.⁶⁷ Women who were very young when their parents became adherents of the Nation were able to choose for themselves if they were going to stay in the bosom of the community or leave once they reached a certain age. Some opted to depart the group in hopes of obtaining positions in the wider white world or to live an unrestrained life.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, the great majority of those who came in as young people chose to remain in the community thereby writing a letter to receive their "X."⁶⁹ As there is no compulsion in Islam, and thus every individual must at some point choose to follow the principles of Islam or go in a different direction this proved no different in the Nation.⁷⁰

Nation of Islam's---Sister Barbara

My name is um, Barbara uh, I was born in 1936, April 6th, 1936. Uh, my parents, uh, Father Joshua and Sister Beatrice and they begot 11 children, I'm the third of 11, third oldest and um, I was born in Hightstown, Jersey, well Trenton because Hightstown, the small town, did not have a hospital, but I was raised in Trenton, I mean Hightstown and then uh, when I was about five, we moved to Philadelphia. So I've been here ever since, but um, my father was (inaudible), I mean, I think he said his grandmother as a matter of fact um, Grandmother Gladys, she's the one that brought him into Moorish Science Temple and uh, subsequently, all our lives, all my life, we were taught that Allah's the father of the universe. So um, so I've been knowing about Allah ever since, you know, I mean the name of Allah.

My father came into, with Elijah Muhammad when I was young and I was sickly, so I was in the hospital for about four years when I was

12 and I got out when I was 16. As soon as I came out from the hospital my father took me right to the temple, okay, and at that particular time um, it was on Columbia Avenue that's where they meet and then after that they got um, um, Bailey Street, uh, we went and got the Bailey Street, which was a much nicer place. At that particular time, it was closed up and we went looked at it and I remember I was one of the uh, young people that went to look at it and then that turned into our temple, Temple 12 and um, our imam was, excuse me, our minister was Brother George X.

I didn't go to black churches, I didn't go to church period, but I did used to visit because my grandmother, may Allah rest her soul in peace, she was a Christian, that was a fantastic woman. When we were so cold with my father and didn't have much to eat, my grandmother lived in Jersey, she sent money and food and came to visit us and always brought us stuff. As a matter of fact, my family were the only ones at that particular time, my father and his children that were Muslims or Xs or whatever, just our family, my brother, my father and mother and brothers and sisters, not other people in the family.

So I started going with my family and so uh, guess I was about 16 then, 17, but then something in my being at 18 years old that, oh, wow, I mean, you know, I thought I wanted to like, I see the other kids, young people doing things and I wanted to do things, but I said to myself, "Wow, I can't do that, I can't, I, I can't do what other people do." So I uh, surrendered to Islam when I was about 18 years old and uh, my own self, not because of my father or my mom or anybody told me because it's in my being, but throughout time, I've made a few mistakes, you know, but I'm 72 years old now and thanks to Allah I'm still here and I thank Allah for his mercy and blessings in great and my father is 97 years old, Brother Joshua, he's still living. And my mom is Sister Beatrice and she's still living and she's 92.

And uh, although, one of my baby sisters, the youngest daughter, uh, child is dead and my oldest two brothers are gone, but they're, but out of 11, 8 are still living.

Getting the "X"

My father joined the Temple early like maybe 1949 or 1950, at that particular time, I, I think he joined it because I think he liked what he heard---You know, I think he liked what he heard. Um, and then of course, that's all I can say. I think he liked what he was hearing about Elijah Muhammad, who did a lot of different things that were

going on here, so . . . I remember him visiting [Elijah Muhammad]. Uh, my father couldn't write good. It took him a long time, see you had to write to get your X . . . And if you didn't write it correctly, you had to keep going on. So it took him a long time to get his X even though he was still coming, okay. He came before I did, you know, and I would say that, I would say that um, that 1952, I came in, and my father, I mean, before I did that, I told you I was four years in the hospital, so uh, he was coming for many years, but he didn't have, couldn't, he couldn't write to get his X, but he was still coming, okay. But I got my "X," um, I would say, 1952. Yeah. Yeah, I was like, yeah, I was like a, a lieutenant. I became a lieutenant and then I also helped out with the secretary of the department because I was always energetic. I was on time, I came first, I was always on time and then I would help out in any way. I replaced a girl who was always late and I got her post," and I also, when they gave out the MGT pins, one is the lieutenant, so the captain and the lieutenant and the officials have it, but the two sisters that was lieutenant, they got a MGT pin and I got one because Malcolm gave me one because he said he appreciated me helping out. So in the beginning, we only had three people have the MGT pins and I was one of 'em.

On Obligations

Our roles as women were to um, find out what Allah expected of us and that was to be (inaudible), to help (inaudible) to our husbands and our fathers and brothers and mothers and sisters and children and do whatever you had to do. Like me, I used to cook and do anything that was needed, you know. I remember, um, I, um, do a dinner, I did most all the cooking, but then you didn't gruff, you just did whatever had to be done. You know, and that's what I loved about Islam, you know, it didn't matter what men and women had to do, we all just worked together to fulfill that obligation and to me, it was an honor, I really loved that fact.

I was out for a few years in the early 1960s. Um my husband was threatened and we were not allowed back . . . He went somewhere he was not suppose to go. Did not follow orders. I wasn't dismissed but he was. But I did come back. Um, I came back because I just loved Islam. I felt, I was feeling isolated, and my mom and all my family was still in it, okay. And I really missed, I really missed being in it. I was put out because of my husband, not because of me you know, and I kinda missed it because I loved Islam and as things was beginning to develop, you know. Um, so my husband came and got me, brought me back to the mosque, the temple, and we was accepted back in, okay. And I've been ever since,

(inaudible), and I'm working (inaudible). I don't call myself, having a position or anything I just help wherever I'm needed.

On Elijah Muhammad

Elijah Muhammad he was a small statue, but he had such power and strength. As a matter of fact, when I went to Chicago one year, I stood post on the roster where he was. I, the sisters chose me, I felt so proud to be on that roster with him, I'll never forget it. Oh, like you were on post, so that meant you're looking out in the audience to see if there's any trouble, 'cause you know, you don't know who might want to come and do something and so you have people on the roster, on the uh, uh, what do you call it platform, or post. Then you had people standing down and you had people that's incognito that they don't know that you're a post, but you're watching to see what people are doing. So I was honored that particular time. Women did not do it all the time, we didn't, but we were always on posts at certain places. At this particular time, I was on post, I was on the roster for when Elijah Muhammad was teaching. And I felt so blessed, I mean, I stood post, let me see, four or five hours, my, when I got off post, my feet were swollen up: But I would not complain, I was delighted to do it.

Final Thoughts

I loved Elijah Muhammad. Well like he came into a, a place where African American people were treated like, we weren't, we're second-class or something. He's the one that taught our men, you're not second-class, and our women and people, you're human beings that don't allow people to treat you like that and guess what? We've got respect too. Once you start saying, you know, if you do something to me, I'm gonna do something to you. He's like, "Before you could hang and do anything, rape the women, our women and stuff." Not gonna happen not now, never again Uh uh, uh uh.

When I came in, it was, it didn't seem strict because I was a part of it, but it was strict. Um, in a sense I did like it. I, I, I um, I liked the fact that when you make men take care of their children and especially sometimes, I came from a very poor family . . . and I mean, you know, (inaudible) so-so, but yeah, you were taught you take care of your family, feed your children. There was no choice.

Gender Roles

Gender Capital is the knowledge, skills, and experiences that confer power and privileges along gender lines. It is an ideology that gives advantages and/or elevates to a higher status an individual or group based on one's sex. Gender capital allows an individual or gender group to succeed or advance based on qualities of what is agreed upon that constitutes masculinity and femininity.⁷¹ Linked to gender capital is the idea of respectability although in this context it is void of class.⁷² Both women and men in the NOI possess gender capital. How they use it depends on their individual needs and desires. For the woman and man, gender capital is tied to both traditional work such as motherhood and fatherhood, career and community, which work in tandem. Most Nation women married, worked outside the home, and also labored within the community, as did men. However, the roles most popularly highlighted as pivotal to community development and conscious raising concern Nation women as mothers and to a lesser extent wives. Indeed, the Nation elevated the role and value of motherhood so significantly that it empowered women members with an unrivaled level of gender capital, an amount few roles for Nation men could ever surpass.

In the Nation, a Black mother in a majority white and oppressive society, who deliberately attempts to eradicate all signs of slavery and dependency within her children, is perhaps the single most important contributor to Nation building. In motherhood, and to a lesser extent as wives, the Nation provided a medium through which Black women served as core agents of the development and

purveyance of Black consciousness.⁷³ Conceivably, the elevation of Black motherhood and wifery played a significant role in helping maintain women after they joined the Nation. Outside of the Nation, Black motherhood had been largely taken for granted excluding some of the tremendous work done by early club women, and viewed as a mere function of birthing children, a “double duty” or for some burden.⁷⁴ Although unquestionably valued, there was little honor in domestic work and the rearing of children, and these topics were certainly not widely held in high esteem during the time of the Nation, 1945-1975.⁷⁵ Instead, the great majority of Black women during this era fulfilled domestic task for white women in order to earn a wage.⁷⁶ Still, Black women have consistently indicated that they value the role of mother and consider it an important aspect of their sex identity.⁷⁷ Wolcott, surmises that the “Nation of Islam . . . promoted a potent combination of masculine self-determination and female [and male] respectability that had wide appeal and undermined established denominations.”⁷⁸

In the Nation of Islam, being a mother was considered, by both women and men, not “double duty or burden,” but one of the more influential positions a woman could hold, was seen as an essential tool of communal preservation and liberation. Motherhood allowed women to actualize their own dreams through their children, particularly as change agents in their communities and perhaps even the world, not simply as another job.⁷⁹ Maternal positions quite possibly solidified the bonds between husbands and wives and gave women who did not have the chance to obtain higher status through a college education or career an opportunity to do so through their children. It also gave women who had children

but perhaps no practical skills the opportunity to cultivate a skill set and lead and train others.⁸⁰

Marriage by extension contributed to family development and was another path of respectability and by extension gender capital, which, like motherhood, is an additional critical component to Muslim community life.⁸¹ Every Muslim woman and man desires to be married “both partners work to secure a domestic sanctuary, where kindness, love and mutual respect abound.”⁸² These community-building experiences give each member a platform to hone the specialized training received from M.G.T. and F.O.I. programs and provides a sense of “buy-in” needed to ensure the social and spiritual success of the Nation’s community overall. The Nation’s Muslims imbued so-called women’s work, in effect motherhood and wifery, with then unrivaled social and cultural capital. These highly esteemed positions were used by women as a point of departure for securing the benefits of respectability and self-worth. Respectability became linked to religion as a political act and embedded in the embrace and practice of the major Islamic tenets. Unlike the dominant cultural caste of the time, respectability was the valued currency in the Nation, supplanting and diffusing the impact of class, challenging the popular conclusions of some historians.

In the first place Islam abolishes all individual class distinction. ‘Surely the most honorable of you with Allah is the one among you most careful of his duty’ sounds a death-knell to all superiority or inferiority based on rigid caste or social distinctions. Mankind is but one family . . . Islam thus lays down the basis of a vast brotherhood in which all men and women---to whatever tribe or nation or caste they may belong and whatever be their profession or rank in society, the wealthy and the poor have equal rights, and in which

no one can trample upon the rights of his brother.”⁸³

Family makes one respectable in the eyes of Muslims as opposed to class or socioeconomic status.⁸⁴ Respectability is built around family; providing a kind of cultural capital for members. The ideas of being upright and qualified as a mother and wife are primary and secondary levels of gender capital women are able to barter to obtain particular positions, the implementation of ideas, or simply reverence. In Nation of Islam lore, borrowed from the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, “heaven lies at the feet of the mother . . . and one who treats his wife kindly will be with me in heaven.”⁸⁵ Although women had always held these kinds of conventional positions, these domestic roles had never been as highly elevated and valued simultaneously by Black women and men as they had become in the Nation of Islam. Essentially, in the Nation “women were . . . mothers who were interested in finding better methods of child and home care.”⁸⁶ Many believers, both men and women, not only aspired for domestic roles but also had options to secure laborer positions as an officer of rank mutually open to both the sexes.⁸⁷

As wives, women were encouraged to work in partnership with the husbands to provide a familial environment that fostered cooperation, intellectual growth, discipline, proper diet and high moral conduct.⁸⁸ Muslim women, men or children were never to be idle as they were encouraged to follow the strict guidelines laid out by Muhammad staying away from those things that took them away from their work and faith such as television, drinking, smoking, or any illicit actions.⁸⁹ Most times followers were expected to be engaged in constant study

or visiting with other believers. Muslims found ways to stay involved outside of the home as well. Mothers ensured their children were properly sent to school and always prepared. It was typical for women to have both public and private lives unless they had children. Then, as Sister Intisar remarked, a woman would “actualize” her involvement through her children, ensuring they would help in building the Nation. Not all Muslims followed the laws outlined for them; those who were discovered deviating were investigated, tried, and judged; while those violators who were not discovered lived in constant fear of being discovered and ousted.⁹⁰

Women used their power through their husband sometimes---those who had a lot of children. They would garner support from the other women too---those who could not be as involved as they wanted. They were very smart and very capable but could not be as involved because of children but they “actualized their capabilities through their children when they could not for themselves. That was true for a lot of women.⁹¹

While women were taught skills to become good wives and mothers—breastfeeding, taking care of home, eliminating dangers in the home, increasing one’s own knowledge, following Islamic instruction and prayer, budgeting, shopping, and seeking disciplinary methods to eliminate delinquency--men learned through formal instruction about husbandry and fatherhood. According to the Nation of Islam, these roles were not to be taken lightly and required serious methodical training and instruction.⁹² Nothing in the Nation was taken casually and any hint of domestic abuse from women or men was swiftly addressed.⁹³ Brother Harold, a former member and Investigator for the Nation of Islam, spoke about suspension and spousal abuse stating:

A woman had called me and reported her husband to me saying he had abused her daughter. So, you have to investigate anything that is brought to your attention. So I went to the home and you know you also have to have proof. So I went to the house and she showed me the bruises on her daughter's legs from the strap her husband had used. The strap had went around her legs. So he was found guilty and this brother was suspended. Most times we brought it to the whole community; sometime if it was very sensitive just to Sister and Brother Captain and Minister and other officials. Any infraction any breaking of law was ground for suspension. Some automatic suspension and others you may get 1 or 2 warnings and probation . . . The laws---the laws came down from headquarters, Chicago. They were created by Fard Muhammad. It was really hard for some people if you were found out smoking, drinking or fornicating you were going to get suspended and this was really tough on a lot of people who wanted to be there but did not drop some of their habits. Always fear of being found out when you were not living by laws. If a man beat his wife he was put out. If you were given an official position you were under higher scrutiny if you are not living right or doing right you cannot hold a position. People always looking to you as an example if you found out you will be removed. You have to be living upright by the laws to be selected not just about likin somebody you had to be qualified. Even Messenger children got put out--- laws were for everyone.⁹⁴

Mastery of dietary laws was also extremely vital for every Muslim to know, particularly women who were potential wives and mothers, although all men were also required to learn basic cooking skills.⁹⁵ Elijah Muhammad provided a brief account within the NOI orientation booklets that provided an overview of what foods Muslims were allowed, and forbidden to eat. In the Muslim cookbook, it states, "O men eat the lawful and good things from what is in the earth, and follow not the footsteps of the devil. Surely he is an open enemy to you."⁹⁶ Understanding the Muslim diet required adherents to know the kinds of ingredients they could use, acceptable ways of preparation and presentation, and technical terminology so when shopping they were aware of which foods were prohibited and those that were sanctioned. The Muslim cookbook was quite

detailed in how food should be presented to guest and or family. Many women, particularly Ministers or official's wives, would host dinners for other local or visiting Muslims or dignitaries such as Muhammad Ali. There was an expectation of complete regimen in relation to the Nation even when it came to hosting, cooking, cleaning, rearing and studying. A conscious diet promoted a conscious mind.

Routine is part of the overarching goal of discipline and re-education. These dietary laws are in direct response to not only the religious but also the health and economic condition of the people at the time. The remainder of the cookbook offers a variety of cuisine popular in majority Muslim, Asian and African regions, food terms to discern between the pork and non-pork items and the range of names used to define food along with the origins of the dish. It also consists of a listing of cooking techniques like "Dredge" or "Panbroil," "facts about cheese," milks, meat substitutes, and "facts about salads." Like other cookbooks it gives specific cooking directions in addition to the items outlined above. The foreword reads: "This book of recipes has been compiled in order to assist the many Brothers and Sisters who desire to eat the right foods and to prepare them correctly for their consumption."⁹⁷

Muslims referred to the kitchen as "the medicine cabinet." They claimed that there was no disease that the proper diet could not cure. Cooking was very important part of ensuring a healthy Nation, although both women and men cooked the meals for special events such as bazaars, school lunches, and other social activities, in the private sphere women who were married made sure they

studied the lessons concerning dietary laws to ensure the physical and mental well-being of their families. Both single men and women were encouraged to learn the art of cooking and to take their lessons seriously as to ensure their own health. At least one participant joked that, “the best cooks got the best husbands.”⁹⁸ This suggest, that women who cooked Muslim foods well were actively sought after by Muslim men, as highly potential mates, resulting in a capital that women could use to secure one of the more promising and desirable men in the community. Being able to maintain a clean, home, carry herself in a dignified manner, dress modestly, cook, find knowledgeable of self and world affairs and posses the scientific training to be successful at raising citizens for the Nation were compiled to provide Black women with a capital they could use. Muslim women came to be treated with great respect or maybe even feared by both Blacks and whites.⁹⁹ They would only buy from Muslim establishments and when not available only from thoroughly research businesses that were approved by the wider community.

Community Expansion

Joining the Nation for Black Muslim women meant not only protection from the advances of white men and the abuse and manipulation of white women but any physical or mental abuse by Black men and women as well. This did not mean that women were never abused; at least one interviewee said he was put out for such an infraction. Nation doctrine and community values certainly did not support such behaviors and when found out they rigorously addressed them.¹⁰⁰ There was no issue too personal to bring before the community as followers of

Elijah Muhammad saw themselves as an extended family. Tate suggested this was sometimes unwelcome as some members complained of this as being “too imposing.”¹⁰¹ For example, Investigators were dispatched to homes to ensure they were properly kept, children cared for, abuse reported and brought before the community and any other violations quickly handled.¹⁰² But this “imposition,” or close scrutiny, did not appear to have thwarted the registration of women.

As evidenced in their narratives, Black women signed up, remained, and some even left the Nation of Islam for a variety of reasons: dress, strict codes of behavior, opportunity to work in engage in wider white world, loss of interests, suspension, and later the move to a more so-called orthodox Islam. Some women likely became adherents or risked possible abandonment by their husbands while others signed up because of the Black militant message espoused by Clara and Elijah Muhammad and their followers. Still others were searching for spiritual home. There were a few who joined as a result of the power and prestige Muslim women exhumed, while others possibly saw it as the most rebellious and radical action one could take during the era; as Sister Intisar states “Islam definitely is captivating and during that era, it was like the bomb!”¹⁰³ Many women enlisted since other family and friends had become members, while others enlisted due to the respect and pride Muslim men seemed to exhibit toward Black women.¹⁰⁴ Pride and dignity appeared to be a point of comfort for both men and women would-be adherents.

Women of all ages and socioeconomic backgrounds became a part of the Nation of Islam from 1945 to 1975. Some scholars have argued that a great

majority of the followers were from the ranks of the very poor and undereducated.¹⁰⁵ However, this is not completely accurate. Many of the so-called Black middle to upper class did enlist in the group in the mid-1960s and early 1970s. The Nation of Islam was appealing because as a community it proved fearless in the face of white people's threats and murderous behaviors. It was perhaps the first group, post-World War II, to explicitly turn white supremacy on its head, by barring whites from entering community meetings and other social events; white news crews from filming interactions, also, it reconstructed the identity of black women, men and children, and provided them with a well-articulated and achievable direction and purpose.¹⁰⁶ It gave the great majority of adherents a new life, a clean way of living and a peace of mind they had never known living in a highly racist white society. But, more importantly, it gave members a sense of value and belonging to a much wider and cohesive national and even international family than many had yet experienced. Regimen kept Muslims occupied and focused leaving little time to backslide into drugs or other nonproductive behaviors, although some did. A few adherents claim "it was a recovery place for a lot of people;"¹⁰⁷ a restoration from racism, discrimination, spiritual servitude, economic poverty, drug use, low self esteem, prostitution, a life of crime, and more.¹⁰⁸ Essentially, there were political, religious, cultural, social, familial, educational and economic reasons for Muslim women and men to become followers of the Nation of Islam during the era of Black consciousness.

The work that the believers of the Nation of Islam embarked upon during the era of black consciousness, 1945 -1975, was meant to restore them to their

proper place in human civilization and to provide their progeny with dignity, and to develop a sense of self-worth that was taken from them and their ancestors during European-American slavery. The Black Muslim women, in their own words, tell us that the reasons women joined and remained with the Nation of Islam post-World War II were extremely complex and multidimensional. In some cases men coerced them into coming out to the meetings and in at least one case pressured one member into joining. Yet, even when women may have been initially coerced to enlist, they, like those who voluntarily came, at some point claimed the community as their own, becoming involved and sincerely sharing in the process by which they truly accepted the teachings and way of life.¹⁰⁹

Whether they were searching for a spiritual home, a husband or life-time companion, a place of refuge from a harsh cold and racist world, Black women were undoubtedly emboldened in the Nation of Islam unlike in any other place or organization during this period. They each found a purpose, family and a new life; one full not only of competition, camaraderie, respect and admiration but sometimes disappointment, harassment and later even abandonment. Women made informed decisions to not only join but to remain in the Nation. Taylor purports that “women pondered the benefits to them as women and to their entire families. Their membership was not casual; on the contrary, at the moment they elected to join they were committed for life.”¹¹⁰

Roll Call: Prominent Nation of Islam Women

As they have been historically unacknowledged, the following are brief biographies of women who were involved in the Nation of Islam. Although little is

known about them and even less has been documented about these women, it is essential that they be recognized and recorded into the historical annals.

Of all women we looked up to Clara Muhammad. I think all of our focus was there. Because she was married to Elijah Muhammad Clara Muhammad was the wife of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. She was a beautiful woman and she started our schools because she refused to put her children in public schools. And they came to the house one day, these burly, you know, she called them these burly, big, burly white guys, you know. She said she'd go to her grave before they take her children out of there. They didn't take them. So again, you had that kind of spirit so all of us admired her tremendously. She was the example. And every city you also had other women who officiated over you, captains, lieutenant, secretaries, investigators. Some you liked, some you didn't, and that's in everything, you know. Learn what you can to help yourself and to help people around you, you know.¹¹¹

Sister Clara Muhammad, born 1899 in Georgia, was considered the First lady of the Nation of Islam. She was married to Elijah Muhammad, leader of the group. Yet, Clara Muhammad was reported to hear the message from Fard Muhammad and bring her husband to meet him in 1930. She is considered to be one of the first Black women to become a follower of the Nation of Islam. Sister Clara oversaw the Nation during her husband's many absences first when he was on the run from early detractors, and later as he traveled to establish Temples, and again during his bouts with Asthma and other related ailments. While her husband was in prison Clara Muhammad relayed messages from her husband to the Ministers, captains and secretaries on how to best proceed with Nation business. She was the mother of eight children and traveled extensively all around the country and internationally. Although she received little education herself she was self-taught and was an avid reader. Her most valuable contribution to the Nation outside of keeping it in the hearts and minds of the

believers was her work around the national educational system, Muhammad's University of Islam, and the children she left to see that her and Elijah Muhammad's legacy was not in vain. Sister Clara is said to have attended University of Islam graduations giving roses to every graduate, and she was always present at the Science Fairs and other community events. Sister Clara helped raise money for the school and other activities and most importantly, she was an example to all Nation women.¹¹²

Clara Muhammad's daughters, [Lottie and Ethel] her daughters, they're great women. Oh, my goodness, you know, because they stood up and helped other women stand up and be proud of yourself, you know. And they had a tremendous job, you know, and that's an awful pressure. You know, you know, you're in the spotlight and everybody wondering, what are you doing today. What you doing, you know.¹¹³

Ethel Muhammad Sharieff was the second of Clara and Elijah Muhammad's eight children. She was born on October 24, 1922, in Macon, Georgia. Sister Ethel was a young girl when her parents first met Master Fard Muhammad, founder of the Nation of Islam (NOI), in Detroit. According to her niece and brother, Sister Ethel met Master Fard Muhammad personally and spoke of his wisdom and leadership. She, like Clara Muhammad's other children, graduated from the University of Islam and held jobs within the Nation. As a student of Clara and Elijah Muhammad, Sister Ethel had an "entrepreneurial spirit" that led her to the open a business enterprise called "Eat Ethel's Pastries," the first bakery in Chicago belonging to the NOI. She developed recipes and initially baked but then later managed the business in addition to other Nation duties. Sister Ethel also started a factory that produced Muslim dresses and

other clothing, much of what she designed was utilized by Nation women. She was said to be an expert seamstress according to many Nation women. Sister Ethel was instrumental in designing the uniforms for the Muslim Girl's Training and General Civilization Class (MGT and GCC), which as a core component taught students the domestic arts and prepared them to become proper and responsible young Muslim women. She later served as National Instructor of these classes and traveled with her father, assisting him in cultivating the moral character of Muslim girls and women. When her father was jailed, Sister Ethel was twenty years old, yet, she undoubtedly aided in keeping the Nation intact alongside her mother.¹¹⁴

Like her sister Ethel, Lottie Rayya Muhammad also attended and graduated from the University of Islam. She is the third of Clara and Elijah Muhammad's eight children, born on January 3, 1925, in Detroit, Michigan. She was five years old when her parents first met Fard Muhammad. According to her daughter, in describing life after their meeting, Lottie said, "When Master Fard came everything got better for us. We finally moved into a house with doors and running water. We had enough to eat, and life for us was better all around." Sister Lottie was seventeen years old when her father was imprisoned and her mother took leadership of the group. Sister Clara groomed Sister Lottie for leadership and was later assigned by her father to the position of Supreme Captain of the Muslim Girls Training and General Civilization Class (MGT and GCC) in Chicago. Like Sister Ethel, she also taught girls the domestic arts, prepared them to become responsible young women, and entrepreneurs, and

helped women build personal and moral character. Lottie accompanied Minister Malcolm X during his missions to several major cities in the United States to set up MGT and GCCs wherever he established the NOI's temples. Later, Sister Lottie served as Dean of Girls at the University of Islam in Chicago. Both Sister Ethel and Sister Lottie were seen as two of the most powerful women in the Nation not only because they were the daughters of Clara and Elijah Muhammad but also because they were business owners, traveled, held major community positions, and were strong examples of what it meant to be Black Muslim women.¹¹⁵

Sister Beverly Kauthar Maraud is also another women highly touted by the Nation. She was raised in Kearny, New Jersey, but she is currently living in Deltona, Florida. Elijah Muhammad gave Sister Beverly the responsibility of establishing a teacher training program for the Muhammad University of Islam system in the 1960s. In 1957, Sister Beverly became a member of the Boston Temple No. 11 at the age of seventeen. She attended Jersey City State College. And while a student she became active in the Newark, New Jersey Temple No. 25, holding the position of secretary. Sister Beverly graduated from Jersey College with a degree in Elementary and Special Education in 1962. Later, her mother also became a registered Muslim member in Newark, New Jersey. According to Sister Beverly she became inactive in the community for a few years as she traveled and was later employed by the national Head Start program. She states that in the mid-1960s she received correspondence from Elijah Muhammad asking if she was still attending school. With his

encouragement she came back to the Nation of Islam in February 1968 and moved to Chicago. In 1969, Elijah Muhammad asked her to take the lead in developing the teacher training program for new teachers in the Muhammad University of Islam system. According to Sister Beverly, her job “was to train the non-professional teachers and give the school system more credibility.” Sister Beverly became the director of the school in Chicago that same year. She was a highly respected national leader in the community and it was said she helped to formalize the national curriculum and train teachers more effectively. Sister Beverly posits that the “Founding Fathers (of America) drafted documents that heralded ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness’ as G’d given rights in this country and we, as members in [the Nation of Islam] resonate the validity of these high principles.”¹¹⁶

Sister Debra Fayzah was the National Directress of Education for Muhammad Universities of Islam. Sister Fayzah earned an Associates of Science degree in Electronics, Engineering and Fine Arts, a Bachelor of Education degree at Chicago Teacher’s College, and a Master of Science degree in Industrial Education and Technology at Chicago State University. She was also a Captain in the United States Air force Civil Air Patrol. She learned to pilot a light aircraft and earned navigator wings. Prior to securing her position as National Directress, she was a principal and teacher at Muhammad University of Islam No. 2. Moreover, Sister Fayzah taught in Chicago Public Schools for over 14 years. During her tenure as National Directress she was also the advisor to the Muhammad University of Islam national yearbook, a text that contains a

wealth of material about various facets of the community. In reflecting on the construction of the new school she would be soon leading Sister Fayzah asserts:¹¹⁷

Thinking in retrospect to June 1972, I see a time of excitement planning, joys, work, blessings and much praising of Almighty Allah for the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. When the negotiation was in its final stage, Our Dear Messenger would say to me, 'Sister Directress, you are going to be very happy over there.' I could hardly wait for this time to go to see our new building. When I did go, I was most impressed with the expansiveness of the school office and I could picture Sister Secretaries Geraldine and Holly having adequate space to carry out their secretarial duties for Muhammad University of Islam. I was unable to look into my office, 'Office of the National Directress of Education,' because Brother Lieutenant Pasha did not have the key. The excitement and wonderment of what was behind that door held my attention for several days. I investigated the other part of the suite of offices and I found just the place for Sister Queenie to sell school supplies to the children and keep her watchful eye out in the corridors. And finally the Deans would have rooms for counseling. In walking to the room, I had mental pictures of Muhammad's children having individual classroom space in which to work and study. As I walked throughout, I could only raise my voice with All praise is due to Allah for His Messenger. I remembered The Honorable Elijah Muhammad telling my husband when He invited my family and me to dinner, that He wanted the 'proper building' for me to do my work in. And here I was standing in this building that the Messenger of Allah had promised to the Nation of Islam and it was a glorious feeling.¹¹⁸

Tynetta Muhammad, also known as Tynnetta Deanar, was a member of the original and the reconstituted Nation of Islam.¹¹⁹ She is a self proclaimed numerologist, and newspaper columnist who wrote on Muslim women affairs in *Muhammad Speaks* and *Final Call* newspapers for over forty years combined. She is the author of several books including *The Comer By Night*, 1986 and *The Brain: The Tenth System and the Originator*. Sister Tynetta is both an international speaker and theologian and founder of a nonprofit institute in

California which focuses on Math & Science. She also founded Fashann Dress 19 Collection a Muslim women clothing line.¹²⁰

There existed a host of female leaders at the local and national levels of the Nation of Islam whom I could list as significant contributors as National Directors and Supreme Captains, Regional Directors, Investigators, Drill Captains, captains, lieutenants, secretaries, treasurers, security, spokespersons, journalist, MGT instructors and more. Portia Pasha was the Supreme Captain of the Chicago headquarters and the M.G.T. Trainer. She graduated from the Sorbonne in Paris and was said to be an excellent leader and example. Intisar Shareef was the Delaware Valley Regional Captain and Christine Muhammad was the principal at the Chicago-based University of Islam and wrote the first Nation textbook. Harriette Muhammad, Hussein Muhammad, and Bayyinah ShariEFF were all long time contributors to the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper.

Women held critical positions at every stage of the community except formal Ministers. Although women did not officially hold the Minister position there are no available sources that reveal that women were barred from pursuing this post. On the survey, when women and men were asked if there was an instance they could recall when a woman wanted to hold a position and was not allowed based on gender, 16 out of 18 or 89 percent responded in the negative. Still men were the Ministers. Although the Minister oversaw the mosque, he did not hold absolute power. As the local head he often made decisions with the input of all officials, women and men.¹²¹

The hope of the Muslim men and women who followed Clara and Elijah Muhammad was to create a community for the next generation of Muslims in anticipation that they would be able to fully enjoy a righteous and liberated society, where freedom, justice and equality were not hollow words but a reality for every citizen of the Black nation. It is important to note that the socio-religious, philosophical, and cultural legacy, that emerged from the Nation of Islam, can be attributed to both women and men. Yet, Black women were pivotal to the stability, longevity, and success of Muslim community life; essentially, they were vanguards of morality, Islamic culture and critical Black consciousness through both their public and private roles.

Nation women quite possibly faced sexism or mistreatment by Black men on an individual level in the Nation but from all accounts it does not appear this was a wide spread issue. This was perhaps the case as a result of the policies that prohibited such treatment resulting in long term suspension from the group. Yet, we cannot dismiss the fact that both women and men came from various experiences, they had to be re-educated not only about who they were as Black people but also about their relationship with one another particularly living in a patriarchal and white hegemonic society. The Nation from its inception created directives which explicitly challenged the sexist behavior of men toward Black women by not only mandating for protection, but for love, kindness and mutual respect; West supports this notion. This set of principles communicated how sexism and abuse of women would not be tolerated. Additionally, women did not have to volley for positions of power, again and again this was said to not have

been a point of contention as woman held status that placed them in positions of prominence and gave them direct access to Clara and Elijah Muhammad, surpassing the local Ministers.

It is important to note that Nation women and mainstream Black women shared many of the same challenges and concerns from the mid 1940s to 1975. Whether it was drug abuse, smoking, prostitution, economic instability, eating unhealthy foods, or other harmful behaviors, Black Muslim women still faced the challenges of health, poor financial resources, abandonment, lack of education, and other problems. Yet, Nation women did not have these challenges because they were necessarily Muslim and in the Nation but most certainly because they were Black in an inequitable society. Nonetheless, Nation women held a particular advantage in facing these challenges as part of a diverse NOI community whose overall inertia pushed its members to transform themselves positively to shed any debilitating and life threatening attributes. Like Taylor surmised, Nation women were "not robots" and therefore were not the same, in thought or in background; they came from various socioeconomic, familial and educational backgrounds, something that made the NOI very unique, and some may argue, even progressive.

The general belief concerning Islam was and still is that it is oppressive for women, yet the research suggests that this was not the case for the majority of Black women who joined the community from 1945 to 1975. Instead, the Nation of Islam allowed women to be useful not only to the Nation, but to themselves, their families and wider communities. It helped facilitate an intellectual activism

for many who did not surpass, in many cases, middle or high school. Allegiance to the Nation confirmed their worth as mothers, wives and especially Black women. Their embrace or acceptance of “natural” gender roles did not mean they accepted sexism or oppression nor did it signify they were restricted to the domain of home life, although this familial space was extremely important and vital to the progression of the Nation. Both women and men certainly understood the magnitude of the restoration and maintenance of this sphere. The Nation of Islam returned both women and men to the home front and each had a distinct role to play in its success and permanence.

Women were fundamental to the Nation as wives, mothers, laborers, educators, frontline activists and core drivers of black consciousness. They not only fulfilled their roles within the private sphere, but maintained and further developed their public roles within the community as well. As such, understanding their experiences may shed some light on why they became members of the community, why they remained, even why they moved on in the face of alienation and harassment. Most importantly, their encounters demonstrate their vital role in the development of the community. Women demonstrated heightened agency, particularly those who became members in the mid-1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s. Given their choices to stay in the Nation of Islam, at least under the direction of Clara and Elijah Muhammad, the next chapter explores other critical areas of women’s work, particularly the Nations educational programs and its contribution to Black consciousness.

NOTES

¹ Sonia Sanchez and Susan Kelly "Discipline and Craft: An Interview with Sonia Sanchez" *African American Review* 34, no. 4 (2000): 683

² West uses the term "nation builders" to describe Nation of Islam women in her unpublished dissertation. Laborers is a term used by members to designate those NOI members who hold official positions in the Nation of Islam such as Captain, Lieutenant, Secretary etc.

³ Collier-Thomas and Franklin, eds., *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*.

⁴ *Muslim Journal*, "Arab Proverb," September 15, 2006, 42.

⁵ Taylor, "Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam: Separatism, Regendering, and a Secular Approach to Black Power after Malcolm X (1965-1975)," 195.

⁶ This sample set is fairly small to give an accurate assessment however, what it does suggest is that the majority of both women and men perceived their roles as equitable. Yet, a much larger sample should be tested to further explore if and what gender specific inequities existed within the NOI.

⁷ Muslim Girls in Training (MGT) receive instruction in basic academic areas, self-defense, drills, and Islamic Studies. General Civilization (GCC) typically included the domestic instruction and health such as hair and body care, issues related to childbirth etc.

⁸ W.D. Muhammad, "Impact of Islam on Muslim Women," *Mr. Muhammad Speaks*, September, 1960, 31-32.

⁹ Gilkes "If It Wasn't for the Women . . ." *Black Women's Experience and the Womanist Culture in Church and Community*, 17.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Wolfgang Mieder, "'Do Unto Others As You Would Have Them Do Unto You:' Frederick Douglass's Proverbial Struggle for Civil Rights," *The Journal of American Folklore* 114, no. 453 (2001): 332.

¹² Tate, *Little X: Growing Up in the Nation of Islam*, 181.

¹³ M.G.T. "Do's and Don't," July 1961; Elijah Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom*, Vol. 1 (Atlanta, GA: M.E.M.P.S., 1957), 27.

¹⁴ Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, 10.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Interviews with Muslims in Sahib's unpublished dissertation. Hatim A. Sahib, "The Nation of Islam," 135; Multiple interviews by author, 2007-2008.

¹⁷ Taylor, "As-Salaam Alaikum, My Sister, Peace Be Unto You: The Honorable Elijah Muhammad and the Women Who Followed Him," 184.

¹⁸ John H. Bracey, Jr., "Afro-American Women: A Brief Guide to Writings from Historical and Feminist Perspectives" in *Black Women's History: Theory & Practice. Volume One*, ed., Darlene Clark Hine (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1990), 78; Farah Jasmine Griffin, "Ironies of the Saint, Malcolm X, Black Women, and the Price of Protection," in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, eds., Collier-Thomas and Franklin, 218-219.

¹⁹ White, *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*, 247-248; Cynthia Griggs Fleming, "Black Women and Black Power: The Case of Ruby Doris Smith Robinson and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee," in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, eds., Betty Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin, 207.

²⁰ Ross, *Witnessing & Testifying, Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*; Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, "If It Wasn't for the Women . . ." *Black Women's Experience and the Womanist Culture in Church and Community*; Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent, The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*; White, *Too Heavy A Load, Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*.

²¹ *TIME*, "Black Supremacists"; Worthy, "The Angriest Negroes," 103.

- ²² Naeem, "Moslem Convention," *Moslem World & the U.S.A.*, 12-13. On the instruction Blackboard of every Nation of Islam Temple was the American Flag, Cross, and the words Christianity, slavery and death. On the other side an Islamic Flag, Islam and the words freedom, justice and equality. See also Edward Curtis for explanation of "black board." For Black Muslims America became synonymous with Christianity and White supremacy; Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom*, 37; Terris A. Muhammad, *From Plantation to Muslim, A Unique Transformation* (Chicago: Terris A. Muhammad, 1987).
- ²³ Naeem, "Moslem Convention," 12.
- ²⁴ Muhammad, *The Fall of America*, 169.
- ²⁵ Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 28.
- ²⁶ Essien-Udom discusses probability of good spouses as a factor that attracts women. Several research participants in this study agree with his assessment. Essien Udom, *Black Nationalism, A Search for an Identity in America*, 110.
- ²⁷ Filomina Chioma Steady asserts that for the majority of Black women poverty is a way of life. As quoted in Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*, 19; *Muhammad Speaks*, "Black Man Not Safe in Civilized U.S., June 1962.
- ²⁸ Taylor, Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam: Separatism, Regendering, and a Secular Approach to Black Power after Malcolm X (1965-1975)," 195; Betsch Cole and Guy-Sheftall, *Gender Talk, The Struggle for Women's Equality in African American Communities*, 112.
- ²⁹ Betsch Cole and Guy-Sheftall, *Gender Talk, The Struggle for Women's Equality in African American Communities*, 109.
- ³⁰ Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 85 and 194; Essien Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America*, 145 and 147.
- ³¹ Sister Vanecia X, "Devil's Mistake Sent Her to Islam," in *What Islam Has Done for Me. Muhammad Speaks*, September 8, 1967, 25.
- ³² Marcia Y. Riggs, *Can I Get A Witness, Prophetic Religious Voices of African American Women, An Anthology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), xii.
- ³³ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent, The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*, 7.
- ³⁴ White, *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*, 26.
- ³⁵ Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America*, 54.
- ³⁶ Abbie Whyte, "Elements in Negro American Muslims Religious Beliefs," *Phylon* 25, no. 4 (1964): 382-388.
- ³⁷ Walker, *David Walker's Appeal, To the Coloured Citizens of the World but in particular, and very expressly, to those of the United States*, 28; Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, 31.
- ³⁸ Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, 10-11.
- ³⁹ Virginia W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability, African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 183.
- ⁴⁰ Louis Lomax and Mike Wallace, "The Hate that Hate Produced," videocassette, July, 1959. Speech made by Louis X taken from his play "The Trial."; Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 3.
- ⁴¹ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 183.
- ⁴² See autobiography of Tate on various kinds of women she describes in the Nation.
- ⁴³ Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America*, 58-59.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 59.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid*.
- ⁴⁶ Muhammad, "ISLAM: THE REMEDY FOR THE SO-CALLED NEGROES' ILLS," 19.
- ⁴⁷ Lerner, *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*, 149, 156, 205 and 295-296; Ross, *Witnessing & Testifying, Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*, 131; Ginzburg, *100 Years of Lynchings*; Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: Random House, 2002).
- ⁴⁸ Phyllis Palmer, *Domesticity and Dirt: Housewives and Domestic Servants in the United States, 1920-1945* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 61 and 74.

⁴⁹ Curtis, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1975*, 29.

⁵⁰ Taylor, "As-Salaam Alaikum, My Sister, Peace Be Unto You: The Honorable Elijah Muhammad and the Women Who Followed Him," 187; Griffin, "Ironies of the Saint, Malcolm X, Black Women, and the Price of Protection," 215-217.

⁵¹ The sources are composed of the *Supreme Wisdom* which does not gauge women's experiences or participation in any detailed way. Other documents are culled from the speeches of Louis Farrakhan in the 1990s under the reconstituted NOI. Taylor uses the same texts in addition to a few articles from *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper that previous scholars have used such as Lincoln, none of which support her claims. The overuse of feminist texts to explore NOI women's experiences may also have aided in providing one dimensional interpretations of these women; Paulette Pierce and Brackette F. Williams, "And Your Prayers Shall Be Answered Through the Womb of a Woman," *Insurgent Masculine Redemption and the Nation of Islam in Women Out of Place, In The Gender of Agency and the Race of Nationality* ed., Brackette F. Williams (New York: Routledge, 1996).

⁵² Black women experienced misogyny and oppression within and outside the Black church and other Black organizations. This conduct was supported by the organizational structure and doctrine. Most women had to fight for positions of leadership within the Black and liberal White communities but contrary to what some scholars have assumed this was not the experience of Nation women. A methodical examination of documents "by" "for" and "about" NOI women may help to expand notions about Muslim women. Discussion on experiences of Black women in other communities see Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent, The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*; Ross, *Witnessing & Testifying, Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*; Gilkes, "If It Wasn't for the Women . . ." *Black Women's Experience and the Womanist Culture in Church and Community*; Jualynne E. Dodson, *Engendering Church: Women, Power and the AME Church* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

⁵³ Sister Intisar, interview by author, Richmond, CA, April 2008; Sister Dela, interview by author, Atlanta, GA, March 2008; Brother Lovell, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, December 2007; Brother Harold, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, June 2008.

⁵⁴ Taylor, "Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam: Separatism, Regendering, and a Secular Approach to Black Power after Malcolm X (1965-1975)," 195.

⁵⁵ Gilkes, "If It Wasn't for the Women . . ." *Black Women's Experience and the Womanist Culture in Church and Community*; White, *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*; Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story*; Ross, *Witnessing & Testifying, Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*.

⁵⁶ Sister Barbara, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, June 2008.

⁵⁷ Sister Dela, interview by author, Atlanta, GA, March 2008.

⁵⁸ Tynetta Deanar "The Muslim Woman Is Model Personality," *Muhammad Speaks*, January 1962.

⁵⁹ Curtis, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1975*, 113; Tate, *Little X: Growing Up in the Nation of Islam*, 73-74.

⁶⁰ Curtis, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1975*, 113.

⁶¹ There are unsupported rumors that were shared but no evidence to verify the claims that Muslim men would severely injure anyone who molested or harassed a fellow Muslim, sister or brother.

⁶² Sister Alberta, Nurse to Clara and Elijah Muhammad never married. Interview by author, Norristown, PA, January 2008.

⁶³ Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America*, 110.

⁶⁴ At least two women make mention of this being an attraction for some women. Sister Intisar, interview by author, Richmond, California, April 2008 and Sister Melvina, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, June 2008.

⁶⁵ Laborer meetings consisted of both women and men. These engagements were usually for planning to ensure the proper operation of the local Temples and schools. Also see *M.G.T. Orientation Brochure* for women's roles in the Nation; Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America*, 147-148.

⁶⁶ Sister Intisar, interview by author, Richmond, California, April 2008.

⁶⁷ Tate was very young when she was in the NOI. According to her narrative, by the time she was eight years old her family had converted to orthodox Islam.

⁶⁸ Sister Melvina spoke about her daughter leaving and working in "outer world." Though it had a broad impact, the NOI was an insular society. Many people worked both within and outside the community. However, the most desirable position would be to obtain employment within the community.

⁶⁹ Children born into the community did not have to engage in the writing of the letter. However, children who came in with their parents at a young age once old enough had to become members by writing for their "X" if they chose to stay. Betty P. Hunter, "Four Approaches to Zion: An Interpretation," *The Negro History Bulletin* xxix, no. 1 (1965): 22.

⁷⁰ Askia Muhammad, *Concerning Women in Islamic Life* (Washington, D.C.: Askia Muhammad, 2002), 13.

⁷¹ Susan A. Dumais, "Cultural Capital, Gender, and School Success: The Role of Habitus," *Sociology of Education* 75, no.1 (2002): 44-68, <http://www.proquest.com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/>.

⁷² Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability, African American Women in Interwar Detroit*, 5-6.

⁷³ Club women also understood the importance of motherhood creating mother clubs. However, unlike these middle class Black women the assessment of motherhood and her function as "good versus bad mother" were not associated with class. Instead, of class comparisons Nation women trained every women no matter her socioeconomic status in the domestic field for the purpose of home and Nation building. Nation women envisioned motherhood as an opportunity to contribute strong leaders for the Nation and to also actualize their own desires. White, *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*, 71-72.

⁷⁴ Wolcott suggests at the time of the NOI there was a "decline in bourgeois female respectability and the rise of masculine discourse of self-defense and self determination. Wolcott argues, these two ideas are in opposition. However, I believe the Nation successfully blends female respectability, self-defense and self determination. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability, African American Women in Interwar Detroit*, 183-185; White, *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*, 90-92. White offers a brief discussion about the burden of motherhood for Black women involved in racial uplift work.

⁷⁵ Issues concerning motherhood are still important today as there are over a hundred magazines published that specifically address motherhood and parenting. Lynda F. Dickson, "Toward a Broader Angle of Vision in Uncovering Women's History: Black Women's Clubs Revisited," in *Black Women's History: Theory & Practice. Volume One*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine 103-119 (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1990), 104-105.

⁷⁶ Darlene Clark Hine, "The Housewives' League of Detroit: Black Women and Economic Nationalism," in *Visible Women, New Essays on African American Activism*, ed. Nancy A. Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock, 223-241 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Palmer, *Domesticity and Dirt, Housewives and Domestic Servants in the United States, 1920-1945*, 74-76 and 84.

⁷⁷ Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*, 73.

⁷⁸ Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability, African American Women in Interwar Detroit*, 169.

⁷⁹ White, *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*, 92.

⁸⁰ Many Black women did not have any particular professional skills when they entered the Nation especially before the mid-1960s but the NOI was able to hone their practical skills as mothers and wives to help to train other women. In White's work several women, particularly club women admit they have no skill in the care of child or home. The NOI recognized that all women no matter class or background could greatly benefit from such training. White, *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*, 90.

⁸¹ The discourse on respectability according to Wolcott typically "took on gendered characteristics." Also, it was linked to "class divisions outside of work." Respectability was reserved for the more affluent women but certainly not the poor. Women possessed respectability in "dress, public conduct, language, housekeeping, childrearing methods, spending habits, and of course sexual behaviors"; Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability, African American Women in Interwar Detroit*, 5. For most Black women respectability was out of their reach and usually the

goal was acceptance by Whites. NOI respectability although it included these things for men and women, void of acceptance of whites, was expanded by blending the home life and career with Nation work and conscious raising which also discouraged class divisions. Tynetta Deonar, "Family Most Powerful Unit In Islam, *Muhammad Speaks*, May 1962, 8; Lamy al Faruqi, *Women Muslim Society and Islam* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1991), 63-64.

⁸² Taylor, "As-Salaam Alaikum, My Sister, Peace Be Unto You: The Honorable Elijah Muhammad and the Women Who Followed Him," 186; Faruqi, *Women Muslim Society and Islam*, 64-65.

⁸³ "The Brotherhood of Islam," *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook*, 1971.

⁸⁴ Tynetta Deonar, "Family Most Powerful Unit In Islam" *Muhammad Speaks*, May 1962, 8

⁸⁵ Muhammad Temple of Islam, *The Messenger Magazine*, 16; Naeem, "Gems of Thought" *Moslem World & U.S.A.*, April – May, 1956.

⁸⁶ Dickson, "Toward a Broader Angle of Vision in Uncovering Women's History: Black Women's Clubs Revisited, 112; *Muhammad Speaks*, "For the Young," May 1962, 8.

⁸⁷ "You helped out wherever you were needed," interview by author with Sister Dela, Atlanta, GA, March 2008 and Sister Barbara, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, June 2008.

⁸⁸ M.G.T. Bulletin, Muhammad's Temple No. 12, 1974.

⁸⁹ Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom*, 21 and 42.

⁹⁰ Brother Harold, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, June 2008.

⁹¹ Sister Intisar, interview by author, Richmond, CA, April 2008.

⁹² *M.G.T Orientation Brochure*.

⁹³ Tate, *Little X: Growing Up in the Nation of Islam*, 181.

⁹⁴ Brother Harold, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, May 2008.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ *Muslim Cookbook*.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Sister Myra, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, January 2008.

⁹⁹ Tate, *Little X: Growing Up in the Nation of Islam*, 121 and 181.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 181.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 93.

¹⁰² Brother Harold, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, June 2008.

¹⁰³ Sister Intisar, Interview by author, Richmond, CA, April 2008.

¹⁰⁴ Curtis, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1975*, 113; Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*, 68; Taylor, "As-Salaam Alaikum, My Sister, Peace Be Unto You: The Honorable Elijah Muhammad and the Women Who Followed Him," 185.

¹⁰⁵ Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 24-25.

¹⁰⁶ Similar efforts to attack White supremacy were addressed by Bishop McNeal Turner, Edward W. Blyden, David Walker and later Marcus Garvey through the U.N.I.A.

¹⁰⁷ Brother Richard, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, January 2008 and Sister Dela, interview by author, Atlanta, GA, March 2008.

¹⁰⁸ Biko, *I Write What I Like: A Selection of His Writings*, 28 and 96.

¹⁰⁹ Sister Intisar, interview by author, Richmond, CA, April 2008.

¹¹⁰ Taylor, "As-Salaam Alaikum, My Sister, Peace Be Unto You: The Honorable Elijah Muhammad and the Women Who Followed Him," 185.

¹¹¹ Sister Dela, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, March 2008.

¹¹² Clara Muhammad, "An Invitation to 22 Million," *Muhammad Speaks*, January 1967; *Muhammad Speaks*, "Clara Muhammad Visits Cairo, Egypt," June 1962; Ross, *Witnessing & Testifying, Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*, 141-163; Sister Halimah, email message to author, February 2009 and interview by author, Atlanta, GA, March 2008; Daa'yah Bilal, *That Remarkable Woman* (Orange, NJ: Daa'iyah Bilal, n.d.).

¹¹³ Sister Dela, interview by author, Atlanta, GA, March 2008.

¹¹⁴ *Muhammad Speaks*, "Clothing Factory on Chicago's 79th St. Proves a Pace-Setter," February, 1962, 16; Sister Halimah, interview by author, Atlanta, GA, March 2008.

¹¹⁵ Sister Halimah, interview by author, Atlanta, GA, March 2008.

¹¹⁶ Sister Maurad, interview by Marvis Aleem, June 2003.

¹¹⁷ "Reflections by Sister Debra on the new building and her position as National Directress," *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook*, 1973.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ There have been several spelling of her name. She wrote under the name Tynetta Deanar and Tynetta Muhammad.

¹²⁰ Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad, Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam*, 128. Julia Chance, "Sisters in the Nation: Lifting the Veil" *Essence*, July 1996, 85.

¹²¹ Sister Intisar discusses the meetings of officials where decisions for the Temple were made by all. Other research participants collaborate her claims.

Chapter 4

"We Must Teach Our Own"

Women as Primary and Pioneering Agents of Black Consciousness

We must educate the character and not just teach them to read and write.¹

The strength of a nation does not lie in the trivial: but its power and growth owe themselves to right knowledge, science, discipline, organization and energy for action. Islam . . . regards knowledge and science the common heritage of all, and we have a perfect right to learn them and make practical use of them for-our-own benefit.²

Ignorance is bliss they say, but life without knowledge is the same as death.³

I am for the acquiring of knowledge OR the accumulating of knowledge--as we now call it, education. After all of you getting an education, if we fail to get the spiritual education we are still subject slaves. A well-educated, cultured and courteous people make a beautiful society when it is spiritual. The right spiritual education is Islam. Re-education of the Blackman in America is a must so that he can qualify to do something for self. He cannot build a future with white people in his mind. He has to study for self.⁴

We must go after higher science in mathematics and the knowledge of how to dig into the earth and bring out of it treasures of the earth which it holds for our necessities.⁵

We must educate ourselves and our children into the rich power of knowledge which has elevated every people who have sought and used it. We must give the benefit of our knowledge to the elevation of our own people.⁶

We should acquire an education whe[r]e our people will become better students than their teachers. Get an education which will make our people produce jobs for self and will make our people willing and able to go and do for self. Is this not the goal and aim of many foreign students who are studying in this country? Will not these students return to their own nations and give their people the benefit of their learning? Does not America offer exchange scholarships to smaller, weaker, and dependent foreign governments so their students will acquire knowledge to aid the people of those countries? Then why shouldn't the goal in

education be the same for you and me? Get an education, but one which will instill the idea and desire to get some-thing of your own, a country of your own and jobs of your own. Take your place with the rising tide of your people.⁷ M[u]slim teenagers have no idle time in which to become juvenile delinquents. The young M[u]slims value wisdom so greatly, most of their time is spent in constant study . . . largely seeking and searching to increase their 'storefront of wisdom.'⁸

In the history of the struggle for Black liberation, education has functioned as a critical site for protests and revolt against white supremacy. Echoed forcefully and persistently in the words of Elijah Muhammad and his followers, and the activism of Clara Muhammad and other women educators, the Nation took the utility of education a step further and positioned it as the central engine for successful community development. Education was endorsed as a catalyzing and deliberate act, carefully planned and designed to reclaim and cultivate the critical consciousness of people who had been told for centuries that they were inferior, intellectually and morally. The Nation placed primary responsibility for this critical task in the hands of its women, in turn making them the core agents of one of the Nation's most meaningful contributions to the struggle for Black liberation: the positive transformation of the self-perception of whole communities. Throughout its history, the Nation advocated the idea that the "elevation of the people" depended on an informed re-envisioning of self for current and future generations, and as such required the scaffolding of a new way of thinking for Black people as a whole everywhere one of the foundational ideas of global Black consciousness.⁹ Global black consciousness is simply the recognition or awareness of a global struggle against European-American white political, economic and religious hegemony. People or groups involved in this are

perhaps nations fighting for independence and self determination like the NOI, South African Black consciousness movement, and other such movements.

From the early operation of a school in their home, Clara and Elijah Muhammad made re-education the cornerstone of 'nation' building. Later these efforts evolved to include the Nation's formal homebuilding initiative, imbedded in another of the Nation's education programs—the Muslim Girls Training (M.G.T.) and Fruit Of Islam (F.O.I.), the most visible keystones of the Nation community.¹⁰ The Nation's focus on requiring members to take the Nation's training and practice into their homes, such as making of home life into a physical, spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and psychological base was intended to enhance and hasten consciousness-raising. Though consistently devalued by previous Nation scholars who have tended to dismiss these activities as stereotypically demeaning woman's work, the homebuilding efforts led and conducted by Nation women were not only heralded by Nation leadership, but they were widely recognized as the fulcrum with which the community would, and did raise its own positive sense of self-pride and common fortune to new heights.¹¹

While some scholars may have recognized the substantial contribution of the Nation to the ubiquity of Black consciousness throughout the Diaspora during the 1970s, none, prior to this work, has presented an accurate analysis as to the manner in which the Nation accomplished such a significant feat. I assert that it was the use, and central placement of its education programs, from homebuilding to autonomous schools, that positioned the Nation to cultivate its signature and unparalleled culture so replete with positive and strong notions of

Blackness and community. The Nation's accomplishments in this area were led by women whose efforts were successful and powerful enough to radiate and serve as a beacon for the Black Diaspora, one that took root and shaped the development of global Black consciousness to its apex from 1965 until 1975. This inspiration is made possible by the recognition of not only the Nation's educational but economic blue print. This is most evident in the developing relationship between Michael Manley Prime Minister of Jamaica, President Abdel Nasser in Egypt and the establishment of schools in Bermuda, and British Honduras.¹² It is also supported by the numerous international groups and individuals that took an interest in the Nation such as the Arab League, Pakistani Abdul Basit Naeem who featured the school in the publication *Moslem World & the U.S.A.* in 1956 and 1957. Another supporter is Essien-Udom, Nigerian scholar, who wrote the second definitive work on the group, not to mention their import business with Peru, and the hosting of various dignitaries from Japan, Kenya and a host of other countries.¹³ This demonstrates, at least minimally, their growing Diasporic importance.

This chapter critically examines the Nation of Islam's educational agenda and its fundamental impact on the proliferation of several of the most significant underlying principles of Black consciousness, liberation, self-awareness, self-determination, and communal purpose. The chapter also explores the Nation's influence on the independent Black school movement of the 1970s, the manifestation of actions spurred by the embrace of Black consciousness, which was shaped in no small part by the Nation.¹⁴

In an effort to provide a more nuanced examination of these topics this chapter is presented in three parts. Part I provides an overview of the origins of the Muhammad University of Islam, and the evolution of the Muslim school system itself from early homebuilding programs to the brick-and-mortar schools that still operate today. Outlined herein are the initial experiences of Nation of Islam women as they sought to educate their own children, first in their homes and then eventually in their own autonomous institutions; the resistance and impediments they encountered as early entrants to the alternative education movement, efforts that would lay the foundation for the Black Independent School movement.¹⁵

Part II, critically investigates how the three levels of Nation instruction worked in concert to give life to the re-envisioning process for members of the Nation, one that would yield the strong, conscious, Black body-politic that would go on to inspire the Diaspora's movement towards global Black consciousness: membership/orientation; Muhammad University of Islam; and the M.G.T program. Here I interweave the voices of Nation women who are in a unique position to provide a concrete and comprehensive picture of each aspect of liberatory instruction as they, as a group, own experiences across the full spectrum of these activities, as converts, students, teachers, homebuilders, and M.G.T.s. Part III places Nation women in the trajectory of Black women's activism as it relates to the broader education movement of Blacks in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s. I offer a general discussion of Nation of Islam women in relation to their contemporaries who filled the ranks of integrationist groups; in

particular I highlight Daisy Bates, who played an integral part in the desegregation of schools, and Ella Baker, who dedicated her life to working with groups like SNCC, SCLC and the NAACP. Both Bates and Baker are two of the most popular 20th century models of Black integrationist women especially as it relates to education. Consequently, they represent an excellent opportunity to juxtapose the contributions and experiences of Black women integrationists, Bates and Baker, and self-determinists, Nation women. As self-determinists equate to separatists in Nation lore then integrationist ideology and self-determinist philosophy are at opposite poles in many ways and will be used accordingly. Although these two groups tend to take varying approaches to Black liberation they share the common goal to alleviate the sociopolitical oppression of the masses of Black people. While I do not necessarily offer a new analysis of integrationist Black women, I do provide the first comparative examination of Black integrationists and Black Muslim self-determinists women during the era of Black consciousness.

“Upon the Education of Its People Rests the Fate Of A Nation:” The early years of the Nation’s Education Program, 1930-1945¹⁶

We must begin at the cradle and teach our babies that they must do something for self. They must not be like we, their fathers, who look to the slave-masters’ and slave-masters’ children for all. We must teach our children with an enthusiasm exceeding that which our slave masters used in having our forefathers imbed the seed of dependency within us. We must stop the process of giving our brain power, labor and wealth to our slave-masters’ children. We must eliminate the master-slave relationship.¹⁷

Knowledge production and self-determination were central to the success of the Nation programs. Self-determination was quite simply freedom and independence in all forms. “Knowledge is the hallmark of civilized human life . . . Knowledge is the capacity to

know oneself, and to have the ability to communicate that knowledge to others.¹⁸

It is with the pursuit and production of knowledge as a community mission that the Nation of Islam gained its first footing. From the outset, the Nation's leaders embraced the sense of urgency and necessity underlining the pursuit of knowledge-of-self described by Harold Cruse who posits that "the farther the Negro gets from his historical antecedents in time . . . the emptier his social conceptions, the more superficial his visions. His one great and present hope is to know and understand his Afro-American history in the United States more profoundly."¹⁹ Similarly, Du Bois writes, "the deficiency in knowledge of Negro history and culture . . . must be met or else American Negroes will disappear and culture will be lost."²⁰ Carter G. Woodson also takes up the point, emphasizing that the Black experience is a matter of cultural and intellectual survival.²¹ He underscores the necessity for education as a tool for liberation, asserting that, "when you control a man's thinking, you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his proper place and will stay in it."²² Du Bois and Woodson made it clear that education was the key to authentic socioeconomic and Black intrapersonal freedom, a sentiment not merely embraced, but actualized by the Nation right from the very beginning.²³ To be sure, no other Black socio-political group would accomplish the establishment of educational institutions as widespread as the Nation did between 1945 and 1975. Arguably, it was the Nation's very attempt to launch a formal and autonomous educational system for Black children nationwide that laid the foundation for the independent Black school movements of the 1970s

and perhaps even precursor to the alternative school movements of the late 20th century, which include organized movements in home schooling, vouchers and charter schools. Abdul Pitre, educator, argues “in the 1960’s, the push for more courses that reflected the multiethnic nature of the United States evolved into multicultural education . . . However, at the root of the multicultural education movement is the philosophy of Elijah Muhammad.”²⁴ Muhammad’s University of Islam, according to Pitre, addresses education from a “universal perspective” and gave “students insight into the nature of racism and the essence of freedom, justice and equality.”²⁵ In addition, not only was Muhammad University of Islam a pioneer for the independent Black school movement post-World War II but it was also an antecedent to the formalization of Black Studies itself.

E. Curtis Alexander, writer, publisher and educator, contends that Muhammad University of Islam:

Believed that instructional content in black educational efforts should include data and artifacts that come out of African antiquity. Such efforts should prepare teachers to teach black children, and should place more emphasis on bringing forth a generation of black learners who could control their own destinies. Today, the black studies programs have an opportunity to provide ‘methodological approaches’ for schools and other educational programs to optimize the educational opportunities for black children. Because of low achievement levels of black children, it is important for black studies to provide manuals of instruction that make use of the artifacts from the African experience to maximally enhance the learning opportunities for the black child in the classroom.²⁶

The Nation of Islam schools were unique from the period of 1945 to 1975 because they operated a completely economically autonomous, national, and later even international system, and to my knowledge there was no other national (later international) black school system completely independent of whites.

In the Nation of Islam, the establishment of an education program generally preceded even the establishment of Temples, which in most cases would subsequently be followed by a formal school.²⁷ This was no doubt partly due to practicalities—until the community could achieve a certain size and scope of resources, it was difficult to secure a permanent facility that could house the work of the community. Yet, the work of recruiting, converting and transforming members of the group still began in earnest, most often in the homes of various members.²⁸ This process of conducting the Nation's training and development regiments in the home before moving out to an autonomous facility is how the Nation of Islam began a phenomenon that would establish the template for both the growth and development of additional communities and the Nation's formal homebuilding program.²⁹

Founded in the home of Clara and Elijah Muhammad, the first Muhammad University of Islam was established in Detroit, Michigan in 1931.³⁰ Clara and Elijah Muhammad had very little formal education themselves. Like other Black southerners only a few decades removed from slavery, they spent the majority of their school-age years in the fields engaged in sharecropping.³¹ What schooling they could access was sporadic and inadequate as a result of the notorious Jim Crow system in the South.³² Upon coming to the North, they found matters little different as Black children attended de-facto segregated schools. Still, even with a limited formal education, both Clara and Elijah Muhammad as parents and leaders recognized and echoed W.D. Fard Muhammad's call to withdraw their children from the Detroit public school system. From the outset, the Nation's

leadership asserted that it would be impossible for Black people to get the education they needed from institutions created and operated by white people, who they argued had no interest in seeing Blacks ascend to their “rightful” majesty.³³ The Nation offered Jim Crow segregation and later white flight from urban centers as evidence of white people’s outright hostility towards any prospect of improvement for Black people. The Nation countered with its own message advocating that only through a disciplined commitment to self-improvement and determination would Black people achieve freedom in all of its forms. This message took shape in the form of a set of studies and practices obligatory to every member who joined the Nation, discussed in more detail below, originating with the study and embrace of Islam and the attendant care and feeding of one’s mind, body and soul in a manner espoused by Clara and Elijah Muhammad and memorialized in their rendering of the Holy Quran.³⁴ What came to be called the “Muhammad University of Islam” started out as the in-home teachings, learning and practice of “right knowledge, science, discipline, organization and energy for action” conducted by Clara and Elijah Muhammad. These core elements would remain the hallmark of the homebuilding program, and later the building blocks of the future brick and mortar schools.³⁵ With these firm steps, the Nation took the reins in educating their own community by cementing the role and responsibility for self-education as one of the highest priorities for the Nation and its membership.

Though its education efforts began in Clara and Elijah Muhammad’s home, it was not long before the Nation’s initial community achieved critical mass

and began to set up formal, autonomous institutions, courting the attention, and reprisals of the white establishment.³⁶ Between late 1933 and 1934 as the number of school age children in the Nation began to grow, the Detroit community purchased a facility to house the Nation's first Temple and Muhammad University of Islam. During its formative years, the Detroit school struggled internally and externally. It was launched during an economically tenuous time for most Americans, and disproportionately so for Black people. Muslim parents had little resources and skill in running their own PreK-12 institutions or in offering Black history, language and higher Sciences which none of the teachers had formal training.³⁷ Externally, the group faced open hostility from the white establishment as the Detroit Board of Education sought to shut the school down by having the parents and teachers arrested, accusing them of "contributing to the delinquency of minors."³⁸ Ironically, this latter action proved a catalyzing agent for the Nation around schooling its own children. As a result, in an effort to avoid a potential riot, the parents and teachers were released and the charges dropped despite their refusal to accommodate school officials.³⁹ Viewed as a historic victory, the Nation's unprecedented challenge to the Michigan compulsory education law was the first significant step towards the establishment of its independent schooling system.⁴⁰ Even though the Detroit school would be forcibly closed several more times, in 1936 and again in 1939, the fuse had been lit spurring the Nation to explode and expand on to the scene of nearly a dozen of the largest cities in the country.⁴¹

As the Detroit school worked to gain its footing, the second Muhammad University of Islam, Temple No. 2, was established in Chicago, IL in September 1934.⁴² This school became the “fountainhead” of the community as it was later designated as the official headquarters for the Nation of Islam, where Clara and Elijah Muhammad would settle until their deaths.⁴³ Even though it was the second official school, Chicago served as a model for other cities. Generally speaking, once an ample number of members joined a particular community, minimum of fifty, a meeting place was either rented or purchased, and eventually assigned a number by the National headquarters.⁴⁴ In order to obtain an official number such as Temple No. 1, the community had to have sufficient “rank-and-file” in addition to official leadership.⁴⁵ Although places like Philadelphia initially had a small following as early as the late 1940s, it was not until the early 1950s that they secured their assigned number, Temple No. 12: “the top of the clock.”⁴⁶

Once a Temple was established, the next step was to organize the school, even if the school did not operate on a fulltime basis, which was the case initially for most cities—for example Philadelphia did not have a fulltime K-12 school until after 1965.⁴⁷ Chicago, Temple No. 2, started with “only two teachers . . . and about thirty students; no textbooks were used by the students. Only two hours a day were allowed for the regular school, but every minute of the student’s time was used in recitation and study.”⁴⁸ As Elijah Muhammad moved from one city to the next to spread the Nation’s message over the next six years (1936-1942), Clara oversaw the daily operations of the community and the school in Chicago.⁴⁹ Like in Detroit, law enforcement, in conjunction with the local

Department of Education, attempted to close down Chicago's Muhammad University of Islam several times, particularly in the early 1940s. Still, many Muslim parents refused to return their children to the public schools even when a significant number of men from the Nation were jailed in 1942. "[W]hile the brothers were in Federal Corrections Institutions, the Sisters of the Nation of Islam worked hard and kept believers together by holding meetings and school in one another's homes."⁵⁰ After 1945 the Nation reopened the Temple and school in a much larger facility—despite the antagonistic and undermining efforts by local white authorities, the Nation had solidified its headquarters and was there to stay.⁵¹

Between 1934 and 1945 schools and Temples were opened in four additional cities—Milwaukee, WI (Temple No. 3), Washington, D.C. (Temple No. 4), Cincinnati, OH (Temple No. 5), and Baltimore, MD (Temple No. 6)—each of whom contributed to the framing of the early curriculum and educational methods that would eventually be used throughout the Nation.⁵² Other Temples and schools followed between 1945 and 1955: New York (Temple No. 7), San Diego, CA (Temple No. 8), Youngstown, OH (Temple No. 9), Atlantic City, NJ (Temple No. 10), Roxbury, MA (Temple No. 11) and Philadelphia, PA (Temple No. 12). There are no records available that allow us to assess the number of students who attended these schools in each city, however, the principal in Philadelphia claims they housed over three hundred and fifty students by 1975, Philadelphia was considered one of the major cities as both Malcolm X and W.D. Muhammad lived there temporarily.⁵³

The Nation Schools post-World War II

Although the Nation's schools were established in the 1930s, it was not until after World War II that the community would be in a position to expand its independent school system.⁵⁴ The goal of these schools "[were] to enable Muslim children to receive instruction in an environment that was consistent with the philosophy, goals and objectives of the organization . . . 'know self,' 'love self,' and 'do for self'"⁵⁵ Yet, the sociopolitical landscape continued to engender a contentious environment for these institutions. While segregated schools had been the rule of the day, it seemed the Nation's assertion that they were deliberately choosing to educate their own people, and that this education would in fact be superior and driven primarily by the teaching of their own history, drew attacks even from within the Black community. Ironically, it would be the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education* that would fan the flames of the Nation's rapidly spreading message that a separate education apparatus for Black people, by Black people was not only preferred, but paramount.⁵⁶

Many within the Black community viewed the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision as a major and positive turning point in Black education.⁵⁷ While some school districts were completely segregated before the ruling, others were segregated only at the elementary level, and integrated in high schools, which was the case in Topeka Kansas in 1950.⁵⁸ The decision galvanized a large segment of the Black community giving Civil Rights advocates the firm footing they sought on which to build their efforts to integrate the "better" schools, a

position several leaders felt was weakened and undermined by the Nation's 'separate and superior' education movement. Still, as Black youth began to enroll in majority white schools, they were often unwelcomed and met with virulent outrage.⁵⁹ Moreover, the curriculum that had previously emphasized the inferiority and irrelevancy of Black people remain unchanged.⁶⁰ Additionally, the boon of opportunity for more jobs for Black teachers similarly did not materialize. "[A] decade after Brown, ninety-eight percent of black kids in the South were in Black schools. Almost no white kids in the South were in black schools. There was almost no desegregation of faculty and so forth."⁶¹ By 1965, although the Elementary and Secondary Education Act increased federal funds available to schools, white flight from neighborhoods in the North left urban schools in financial disarray with some districts employing new tactics to maintain de-facto segregation—"Northern school boards would zone their schools, which means they would locate schools in areas to intensify segregation."⁶² By 1970, Black students were still being escorted by law enforcement officials to schools to desegregate them in places like South Carolina, while continuing to receive inferior treatment and education even in these new environments.⁶³ From the Nation's perspective the Brown decision was at best a pyrrhic victory, one that may have ended the legal acceptance of the "separate but equal" doctrine, but one that did not and could not guarantee an equal (or better) education for Black people; that was something only Black people could do for themselves.⁶⁴

In the middle of this upheaval, the Nation schools became increasingly popular.⁶⁵ Their message of an education driven by self-determination

resonated and spoke to an ever-growing segment of the Black community who tired of waiting on the white man to give them their freedom. These people valued and respected the similarity of Muhammad University of Islam to the white private and parochial schools who also “resisted most external influences and control of their schools”⁶⁶ Building upon the legacy of freemen “native schools” discussed by historian James D. Anderson in his seminal work, the Nation’s educational program was a forceful, deliberate, and community driven rebuff of the “second-class education” and sociopolitical servitude that characterized the other education options available to Black people during the mid 20th century.⁶⁷

From 1945 to 1975, the Nation of Islam schools changed in three key ways though not in any particular order. First, the teachers were better trained than their forerunners of the 1930s and 1940s and perhaps the early 1950s. But as Sister Dela mentions and I would agree, in the late 1950s and early 1960s there was a trickle of college educated teachers coming into the community, but a watershed of professionals in the mid-1960s to 1970s. Although Clara and Elijah Muhammad were the final say on curriculum, the entrance of more educated individuals bolstered the group’s legitimacy to teach their own. Second, the number of students enrolled also increased. In the 1940s and even earlier we know there were enough children enrolled in the schools that it alarmed the Department of Education and child services in at least the first two schools, in Detroit and Chicago, it is likely the same happen with the other schools much later though not covered by the media such as in Philadelphia, New York and Boston. We also know that all schools started with meager beginnings and were

able to pool their sources and provide adequate facilities at a later time. This possibly changed in the late 1960s as a result of more financially stable individuals entering the community. Cities that had celebrities like Muhammad Ali and Joe Tex, or other cities where Blacks were financially better off than their lower socioeconomic counterparts, may have been able to get their schools up to full operation in less time than the Muhammad University of the 1940s and 1950s. At least one interviewee recalled his visit to a Nation school in Philadelphia, where he said the mosque of the larger schools possessed more technology than many of the smaller schools.⁶⁸ Third, although the higher Sciences and Math were there from the beginning, these programs evolved from the 1940s to 1970s because of the availability of better resources, texts and more qualified teachers.

It appears that positions women were able to hold in the arena of education changed in small ways prior to the 1960s. For example, from the sources I could garner, all the Arabic teachers were male and typically foreign born prior to the 1960s. Yet in the early 1960s, a former University of Islam student of the 1940s, Sister Rosalind X, was the current Arabic teacher at the Chicago school. However, this does not mean other schools did not have women teaching foreign languages. Moreover, women and men held the position of National Director, Dean, and principal throughout the history of the NOI. Clara and Elijah Muhammad appointed individuals to these positions. Both women and men taught an array of classes including Science and Math; this changed very little.

The national curriculum team was made of women and men like Lottie X, Ethel Sharieff, Rose Muhammad, Clark Shabazz, Lonnie Shabazz, and James Shabazz.⁶⁹ Christine Muhammad, a past principal of the Chicago school is said to have “expressed displeasure at the fact that Muhammad would not listen to anyone who knows anything about education.”⁷⁰ What Sister Christine expresses, according to Vontress, is important because this supports the claim that individuals, particularly those who were college educated, did differ in opinion about some of the details of the curriculum and perhaps other parts of the Nation’s program, although minimally. Though there may have been grumblings Clara and Elijah Muhammad had the final word. These reported displeasures or difference in opinion however did not appear to result in any large numbers of adherents leaving as a result. This is likely because adherents gained benefits in other key areas of the community that far outweighed any dissatisfaction. On a local level, a collective of officials, who included women and men, made the decisions about the group; women made decisions about issues concerning women and men about those related to men.

Education: “From the Cradle to the Grave”

You are with the help of Allah, being given an education that is superior to any other education received anywhere in any school in any of the cities and towns in which you live. Though you study some of the same subjects, though you read some of the same books, though you recite some of the same facts and lessons as do your youthful peers in other public, private, and parochial schools you have received and will continue to receive a better ---more comprehensive ---education. WHY---because once you have been awakened it is easy to understand. For you, the Black Muslim Student, in the Muhammad Universities Islam across the country, have been given the first key to the knowledge of SELF . . . Once you ‘Know Self’ you know that the 13 years of school you attend

under the leadership for the White man is an 'educational brainwash' that, without the teachings of Messenger Muhammad, you would have been kept in a state of 'Mental Death.' Mental Death is the most prevalent problem of the Blackman in America today . . . Islam builds character, gives meaning and puts you on the right path.⁷¹

--Sister Beverly Maurad, National
Director Muhammad University of Islam

Although there are few documented sources on the curriculum structure of the Nation's early educational programs, or the number of teachers and students involved, every Temple generally utilized a standard re-education plan for members and their children. This process most often began with the initial writing and acceptance of a "Membership Letter," followed immediately by the memorization of "Actual Facts" and completion of "Student Enrollment." After successfully navigating these requirements, every new member, including any family members, followed rigorous and ongoing behavioral, intellectual, spiritual and physical training and practice—for adults it was the MGT and FOI; for children, schooling at Muhammad University, junior M.G.T and F.O.I. and later Vanguard. Elijah Muhammad and the Nation intended for this process to convene the socio-developmental elements necessary to transform its members from "brainwashed, mentally dead" Black people to righteous Muslim men and woman with "right" knowledge. There is "no compulsion in Islam," and thus the journey to this transformation must begin with a relatively independent, overt act, a deliberate step in the direction of re-envisioning one's self; the writing of the Membership Letter and the receipt of one's "X" would come to embody this famous tradition for obtaining membership in the Nation.

Membership/Orientation

Though all nonwhite people were welcomed to join the Nation of Islam, the main programs initiated by the leadership were geared toward Black people in America, and their unique condition as former slaves who remained under the thumb of their former slave masters. The Nation offered a chance to fully throw off the master-slave legacy and eliminate the stain of slavery. It was also intended to re-educate and reform one's self in order to join the "beautiful society" of the Nation of Islam. To gain membership into the Nation of Islam one could not simply complete a registration card, one had to make a public acknowledgement of one's acceptance of the Nation's message by writing an error-free letter that was supplied, checked, rechecked and approved by the national office. This letter was simultaneously a declaration of faith and an assessment of one's sincerity for obtaining membership. For the acquisition of one's "X" the following letter must be copied verbatim:

Dear Savior Allah, Our Deliverer: I have attended the Teachings of Islam, two or more times as taught by one of your ministers. I believe in it. I bear witness that there is no God but Thee and that Muhammad is Thy Servant and Apostle. I desire to reclaim my Own. Please give me my Original name. My slave name is as follows:⁷²

Muhammad argues, concerning the "X", that, "We do not teach them to disregard their family names—they do NOT KNOW them. We teach them to discard YOUR family NAMES and get into their real Nation's names, for your names are not our legal names!"⁷³

Many people are now familiar with the use of "X" as a last name for Nation Muslims.⁷⁴ It was argued by Master Fard Muhammad, and later Clara and Elijah

Muhammad, that the names of most Black people were the names of their former slave masters, not their original or holy names.⁷⁵ The Nation's leaders maintained that to keep the surname of the former slave master was to remain in a state of self-hatred and oppression. Black people, the Nation insisted, were God's people and as such should have holy names that represented their best and most divine qualities, originating from their earliest state as civilized people. By willingly giving up her "slave name" and taking on an "X" in place of her last name, which stands for "unknown," a nod to the obliterated connection to the motherland, she became an official member of the Nation. According to the Nation, the "X" was pivotal in the initial stage of re-education of new converts who, as the descendant of slaves had little to no knowledge of their long and flourishing history prior to slavery. Later a "true" last name would be bestowed upon the member to replace the "X," an act completed, ostensibly, by Elijah Muhammad himself based on the best or divine qualities or attributes the person demonstrated or displayed.

Writing the Membership Letter lays down the first beam of the reconstructed self; a self-initiated act to walk the path to the faith. Once the letter was received at the national headquarters, the National Secretary is responsible for thoroughly scrutinizing each letter, identifying errors, and sending an acceptance or rejection letter to each applicant. When the would-be candidate receives a "welcome letter" or letter of instructions they report to their local Temple, with letter in hand, for their next set of lessons. If a possible entrant is rejected they may continue to attend the public meetings but are not able to

secure a place in the community or move on to the next stage of re-education. Generally, it took from approximately 6 months up to several years before individuals became registered members of the Nation of Islam. One research participant mused how it took her almost two years to receive an “X” as they refused letters with even the slightest error, “no crossed “t,” no dotted “i,” no period at the end of a sentence.”⁷⁶ This initial process, the meticulous writing of the letter, and other requirements, serves as poignant indications of how much basic literacy was valued—it was vital that Muslims be able to read and write effectively if they were to take meaningful control of their lives and heed the exhortation “to seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave.” Although neither Clara nor Elijah Muhammad completed more than an elementary school education, they both believed education to be a critical component of Nation building. Every adherent was encouraged to obtain at least a basic education in either a traditional or nontraditional way.

The next step in the process involved an initial orientation class, an introduction to what could be expected in the M.G.T. (discussed in detail below). This orientation requires the learning and mastery by heart of the Nation’s *Supreme Wisdom* that included ‘Student Enrollment,’ ‘Actual Facts,’ and original rules of instruction in the “The Sacred Rituals of the Nation of Islam.”⁷⁷ Each lesson was to be learned and recited with one hundred percent accuracy with each person required to pass a written and oral examination in order to move from one lesson to the next.⁷⁸ These materials comprised the minimal fundamental information, history of the black man, the nature of the universe, and

Islamic studies, on which the Nation expected each member to erect their reconstructed self.⁷⁹

ACTUAL FACTS⁸⁰

1. The total area of the land and water of the planet Earth is 196,940,000 square miles.
2. The circumference of the planet Earth is 24,896 miles.
3. The diameter of the Earth is 7,926 miles.
4. The area of the Land is 57,255,000 square miles.
5. The area of the Water is 139,685,000 square miles.
6. The Pacific Ocean covers 68,634,000 square miles,
7. The Atlantic Ocean covers 41,321,000 square miles.
8. The Indian Ocean covers 29,430,000 square miles.
9. The Lakes and Rivers cover 1,000,000 square miles.
10. The Hills and Mountains cover 14,000,000 square miles.
11. The Islands are 1,910,000 square miles.
12. The Deserts are 4,861,000 square miles.
13. Mount Everest is 29,141 feet high.
14. The Producing Land is 29,000,000 square miles.
15. The Earth weighs six sextillion tons - (a unit followed by 21 ciphers).
16. The Earth is 93,000,000 miles from the Sun.
17. The Earth travels at the rate of 1,037 1/3 miles per hour.
18. Light travels at the rate of 186,000 miles per second.
19. Sound travels at the rate of 1,120 feet per second.
20. The diameter of the Sun is 853,000 miles

STUDENT ENROLLMENT⁸¹

1. Who is the Original man?
2. Who is the Colored man?
3. What is the population of the Colored people in the wilderness of North America, and all over the planet Earth?
4. What is the population of the Colored people in the wilderness of North America, and all over the planet earth?
5. What is the area in square miles of the planet earth? How much is the land? How much is the water?
6. What are the exact square miles of the useful land that is used every day by the total population of the planet Earth?
7. How much of the useful land is used by the original man?
8. How much of the useful land is used by the Colored man?
9. What is the birth record of the said, Nation of Islam?
10. What is the birth record of said, others than Islam?

The “Actual Facts” and “Student Enrollment” conveyed specific information germane to the identity and genesis of the Black or “original” man and the white man.⁸² This information was considered by members to be scientific in nature as it reflected a level of detail about the most miniscule aspects of the planet Earth, the broader universe and their connection to the beginnings and significance of Islam, which Elijah Muhammad taught had a strong basis in science and math: He asserted, “Islam is Mathematics and Mathematics is Islam. Let us teach this to our children before they reach the age of one. Let us tell them who they are and the origins of their birth.”⁸³

**Muhammad’s University of Islam
(a.k.a Sister Clara Muhammad School)**

This place where we come to grow to learn
To learn the things that we must know
Our school offers us the Best
Truth, Knowledge & Righteousness
Sister Clara Muhammad, Clara Muhammad School
Named for our Sister Dear her dreams we fulfill right here
She worked and struggled that we may have a place to come today
Sister Clara Muhammad, Clara Muhammad School
We’ll never forget the lessons we’ve learned
We’ll take the knowledge given to us and give it to others in turn
How Proud we are to wear Her name Her memory we hold dear
She opened the door of Knowledge to us we thank Allah for her
Her work has not gone in vain
History will bear her Name
For We will build Our Future Strong with the Truth that she stood on
Sister Clara Muhammad, Clara Muhammad School
Sister Clara Muhammad Clara Muhammad School.⁸⁴

--Sister Salimah

My dear friends, upon graduating from the eleventh grade, I dedicate a possession to you. Life has many unique qualities and characteristics the primary one I call upon is potential. I give this characteristic to you because with this you can do anything, be anything and get anything you wish for. Potential is one of the

things that has helped create the great men and women of our times. Without it we would be nowhere, because it gives us ability for action. Even though potential is paramount and helps dreams and desires to come true, it cannot stand alone, in other words it is dependent. It is dependent because it needs work to fulfill its purpose, and reasoning to guide it along the proper lines.⁸⁵

--Sister LaVenía X

The Nation of Islam offered an educational program for the very young to the very old. Every Muslim was encouraged to pursue knowledge actively and throughout the course of their life. Each school set upon a foundation of Islamic principles which included: "keeping prayer, spending in the cause of truth, fasting, pilgrimage to Mecca, speaking the truth regardless of to whom or what, being clean internally and externally, loving your brother believers as yourself, doing good to all, killing no one who Allah has ordered not to be killed, setting at liberty the captured believer, worshipping no God but Allah, and fearing no one but Allah."⁸⁶

Young people, both Muslim and to a lesser extent non-Muslim, attended the Nation's schools.⁸⁷ The Muhammad University of Islam, while not an actual university, was considered a scholarly community where everyone was involved in advanced and rigorous thinking and learning. Fundamentally, the moniker 'university' signified that the "curricula was universal and . . . advanced, even on the elementary school level."⁸⁸

Although men and women made up the staff of the schools, women played that most pivotal role in helping to implement programs and maintain the institutions. Women were typically appointed the national directors of the school, although some men held the position as well. Both male and female students

received the same subject matter and level of instruction even though the Nation did not support co-education. Single sex classrooms were routine if the facilities accommodated this configuration, which meant that often this applied only to middle and high school students.⁸⁹ While in her autobiography Sonsyrea Tate argues that women were not encouraged to go to school, my research (as does Edward Curtis) strongly contradicts this claim—the vast majority of my interviews reported that both boys and girls were encouraged and often required to learn the same critical material and lessons and to move on to higher education. Curtis' work confirms that young girls and boys were both directed toward studies and careers in the higher Math and Sciences. This stands in stark contrast to the treatment of women during this time outside of the Nation who continued to fight for equal educational opportunities in public and private schools—in comparable programs offered in public education “girls were steered away from high level courses in science and math.” The Nation of Islam had already elevated the “educated” woman to a critical partner in Nation building. Curtis argues, “[t]hrough women in the University of Islam system may have studied home economics and dressmaking, they also studied traditionally male-dominated subjects like science. Teenage girls in separate classes studied chemistry and biology.”⁹⁰

Each school had a unique origination history and varied in structure depending on the number of members and resources in the various cities. Although it was not required to send one's child to a Nation school, it was strongly encouraged. Most Nation schools conformed to the basic standards of their local and state districts in offering the foundational academic courses,

Reading, Writing and Math, but most went well beyond those standard subject areas equipping students to be more advanced than many of their non-Muslim counterparts.⁹¹ One Muhammad University former student maintains:

First, second and third grade weren't in the classroom together because based on my understanding it wasn't like that. There were levels and in order to go from level to level there were specific things you had to know and you moved from level to level based on what you knew, not necessarily on your age. That is why I was able to skip the so-called 5th grade when I went to public school briefly.⁹²

As the community grew it became more structured and aligned with the set up of other private and parochial schools having set grades, but many maintained a mixed grade instruction and independent study for older students. Some schools operated full days from 8am to 4pm while others conducted instruction in shifts either by grades or by gender. For instance, under some circumstances, young men went to school during the day, 6 am to 12 pm, and the young girls went to school in the afternoon from 12 pm to 6 pm.⁹³ At times, this structure was used when the facilities were relatively small or there were limited numbers of qualified teachers available. Schools that operated fulltime, Pre K-12, did not necessarily have students represented in each grade level. At times, there were large numbers of elementary and middle school students while only a handful or high school learners; again, this of course varied depending on the needs and size of the community.⁹⁴

Muslim schools had generally no recreation like recess or sports outside of drilling, calisthenics, judo and self-defense, each of which were generally taught in connection with M.G.T. or F.O. I. training. Most schools attempted to

operate all year round with only two weeks off in the summer. No vacations were observed except Nation of Islam holidays, like 'Saviours' Day (believed to be the birthday of W.D. Fard Muhammad), for this reason February was significant and therefore Muhammad's University of Islam students typically graduated during this month as opposed to mainstream commencements held in June.

Self-education was viewed as extremely important in the development of Black consciousness and highly encouraged within the Nation. Indeed many of the elder members, like Clara and Elijah Muhammad, were self-taught. Clara and Elijah Muhammad applied this philosophy to the individual and the community, insisting that when possible Black children be taught at Nation schools, or at home if no school was yet available—the point was to guard against the lies and indoctrination otherwise offered by white led, run and centered schools. Interestingly, a few young people (especially women) became Muslims without the consent of their parents, in hopes of obtaining a better, more conscious education.⁹⁵

In its later years, the University of Islam employed state certified and non-state certified teachers, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. Some had obtained advanced degrees, particularly those entering the Nation after 1960, ranging from Bachelor of Arts to Master of Arts degrees in a variety of disciplines.⁹⁶ Teachers came from a range of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, with the Nation employing a number of foreign teachers from the Muslim world.⁹⁷ Instructors taught a variety of subjects and were responsible for undertaking serious research to prepare for lessons—teachers and administrators surveyed

texts used from the best schools in their cities in addition to required nation materials.⁹⁸ They also contacted booksellers in hopes of obtaining textbooks they could use that contained a majority of appropriate and accurate information that supplemented the homegrown lessons and texts they created.⁹⁹ One Muslim, Sister Christine Muhammad, Principal at the Chicago school, penned the first Nation textbook a Reading Primer titled *Muhammad's Children: A First Grade Reader*. She collected a great deal of information to construct her text from Carter G. Woodson's *Negro History Bulletin* and other sources. Languages were also extremely important especially the teaching of Arabic which was considered by the Nation as the original language of Black people; English was taught as a second language. In addition, instruction in French and Spanish were also provided when possible.

Elijah Muhammad insured a high degree of global Islamic consciousness in his movement . . . by making the study of Arabic a focal point in the Nation of Islam's schools for its youth. In the 1960s, the University of Islam in Chicago was the largest Arabic school in the United States. Arabic was taught from 4th to 12th grade.¹⁰⁰

The offering of foreign languages was particularly notable given that bilingual education was not widely offered beyond wealthy white students who attended affluent private schools. Likewise, bilingual education did not gain real traction in most U.S. public schools until late 1960s and then only certain students were able to enroll; the Nation of Islam already had been engaged in requiring this for all students as early as the mid-1930s.

In the early years of the Nation, Essien-Udom notes, tuition was not mandatory to attend the school until after 1959 when Nation officials began to

charge to support staff and facilities costs. According to Essien-Udom, Clara and Elijah Muhammad were opposed to charging families any fees, and advocated strongly that any necessary fees be kept minimal.¹⁰¹ Parents did have to pay for textbooks and uniforms, but bus transportation and lunch were free. Families who needed assistance were given support on a case-by-case basis. Clara Muhammad paid the additional fees of many needy children so that they could take full advantage of the Nation educational programs.¹⁰² The Nation of Islam operated the schools under the most disciplined of circumstances. Both the parent and student were always held accountable for student infractions and any violation of school policy could lead to suspension of not only the child but the parent as well.¹⁰³

As discussed earlier, the curriculum went well beyond the 3R's and Nation teachers offered instruction in knowledge of the universe and the higher sciences and women were a significant part of this enterprise. Mankind's history, particularly of Black people was a minimum requirement, as was instruction in Muslim dietary law and character education.¹⁰⁴ Some of the 'conscious raising' work was accomplished by and through the M.G.T. and F.O.I.:

The University of Islam is the main source where the M[u]slim child will learn about his own kind, thus the M[u]slim child has a deep understanding of his true importance and his people's contribution to world culture and advancement. The M[u]slim child has great pride in his race, and holds his head with dignity.¹⁰⁵

Early in the Nation's history, students who graduated from their schools usually went into business for themselves or to trade schools for some kind of apprenticeship:

You would begin entrepreneurship at an early age and continue when you finished school, most of the learning was on the job. Learning under the mentorship cause a lot of it was trade work, being a cook, which you learned under another cook or being a carpenter, the same thing.¹⁰⁶

As one former University of Islam student surmised, "it is necessary for all young M[u]slims to learn all they can."¹⁰⁷ Whatever skills a brother or sister pursued and developed ideally would be kept within the community and used to build the Nation of Islam and raise the consciousness of the next generation. The Nation did not forbid anyone to seek higher education even though many of the first members chose not to attend college or did not have the means. Indeed, the avenue of higher education had been foreclosed for many of the early adherents as a result of the legacy of racism and discrimination. Later in Nation history, beginning in the 1960s, there was more of a focus on students graduating from high school and then moving on to college. These young people were strongly pushed to seek advanced degrees for the benefit of the Nation. The community needed doctors, scientist, and other specialized persons and so encouraged both women and men to pursue these studies.¹⁰⁸

The Nation schools were intellectual and social institutions that used religion as the foundation to tackle the condition of the Black woman and man at the time. Architects of the curriculum, a great many of whom were women, created programs that addressed the social ills of Black people by laying the foundation for the recognition and development of a strong sense of positive Black identity, the foundation of the global Black consciousness movement. With the cry "their maximum is our minimum," the Nation's curriculum quite possibly

exceeded many public and private schools of the time with a focus on subjects that included Astronomy, World History, Chronology, Chemistry, Physics, Self-Defense, Drilling, and Arabic.¹⁰⁹ These schools emphasized strong morals and discipline, preparing young men and women to become responsible and contributing husbands and wives, fathers and mothers. While the schools focused on accomplishing this for the very young, the Nation turned to its M.G.T. unit for its female adult members and converts, whose curriculum itself was very closely aligned with that of the Nation's schools.¹¹⁰

Extended Education–Muslim Girls in Training & General Civilization Class (MGT & GCC)

As a tree is best known by its fruit, the physician's worth can best be judged by his cures . . . for man can be judged best by his WORKS and ACOMPLISHMENTS.¹¹¹

The downtrodden Black Nation is to rise, the old and the young must be taught a thorough knowledge of ourselves and the knowledge and wisdom of the human family of the earth.¹¹²

The M.G.T. had been a part of the Nation of Islam from its inception.¹¹³

The M.G.T. & G.C.C. "was a regular part of orientation for women and girls entering the Nation of Islam."¹¹⁴ The M.G.T. was "designed to inculcate the character of Muslim womanhood in women and girls, M.G.T. and G.C.C. classes were significant in changing the lives of poor women . . . MGT and GCC classes educated women and girls specifically about domestic skills, family life, and proper public conduct, and asserted that characteristics like 'modesty, thrift, and service are recommended as their chief concerns."¹¹⁵ Edward Cutis maintains, "to encourage women in their roles as nurturers, the movement required its female vanguard to attend Muslim Girls' Training (MGT) and General Civilization

Class (GCC). Class activities and subjects included prayer, sewing, art, English, penmanship, refinement, beauty, hygiene, and cooking.”¹¹⁶ In addition he writes:

The “Muslim Girls in Training (MGT) and General Civilization Class (GCC) [sought] to discipline, train, and cleanse the bodies of women . . . Hygiene, personal cleanliness, reading, writing, and maintaining the proper body weight were . . . stressed . . . In addition to offering various classes to members, the MGT sometimes provided opportunities to meet other African American women outside the movement who were committed to social reform. In the late 1960s, for example, MGT-GCC hour was held . . . Church [women] joined sisters from the MGT to discuss their concerns about education and slum reform.”¹¹⁷

“The Nation of Islam’s M.G.T. and F.O.I. were taught to aggressively address and reinforce strong family values.”¹¹⁸ Specifically, the M.G.T was a program that specialized in the proper training of all women no matter their age or socioeconomic background; under the aegis of the F.O.I. the same was provided for the men. These programs were created and implemented to help inculcate women and men with Islamic principles that would help alleviate the poor conditions they found themselves. Further, it was to help re-educate and refocus each individual enabling him/her to qualify not only to be a skilled laborer for the growth and development of the Muslim community in the United States, but also to be a better and more purposeful parent and spouse. The M.G.T. was organized as a network of women who banded together to build a Black autonomous Nation in co-partnership with Black Muslim men. The M.G.T. provided training and skills that broadened the status, choices and roles otherwise unavailable to Black women. The M.G.T. was lead by the Sister Captain and the F.O.I. was directed by the Brother Captain. Each captain had their own staff consisting of lieutenants, secretaries, treasurers and drill-masters.

Both groups had elite cadres called “Vanguards”, as well as junior MGT and F.O.I for the very young.¹¹⁹

Letter to New Recruits

As Salaam-Alaikum

WELCOME TO THE NATION OF ISLAM.

You have successfully satisfied the requirements put before us by Allah and his messenger that qualified you to enter amongst us as a true believer. Your persistence in doing so has awarded you with the privilege of attending our M.G.T. & G.C.C. class.

As a new believer entering into a new way of life—the way of Islam—there are volumes of things we would like you to know. Indeed we wish we could sit you down and tell it to you all at once so you would know for a certainty just as we do that ALLAH IS GOD. THE HONORABLE ELIJAH MUHAMMAD IS HIS MESSENGER AND ISLAM AS TAUGHT BY HIM IS THE ONLY SALVATION THE BLACK PEOPLE IN AMERICA HAVE EVER OR WILL EVER HAVE: but unfortunately we can’t do that. Time won’t permit and even if it did you could not understand it all at once.

One is not simply a man or a woman according to the Nation teachings; instead you must be given instruction and training to become expert men and women who are working toward the liberation of Black people. One of the most important things that you must understand in your new role as a follower of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad is that you are entering into a course of study that actually involves the Supreme Wisdom (a term you will learn more about). A wise woman recognizes that she can never learn too much but she also understands that a higher course of learning starts from a basic foundation. It is the basic foundation that the following material and your further instructions in your orientation class is designed to teach you.

Nowhere in the world will you find a truer brotherhood and a closer unity than that exhibited by the followers of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad amongst which you now number. The Nation of Islam to which you belong is not a cult, sect, or a club; it is just what that name implies—A Nation.¹²⁰

The orientation brochure for the M.G.T. presented new converts with the above welcome letter in addition to a “thumbnail sketch” of Elijah Muhammad, detailing the historical development of the Nation of Islam. Elijah Muhammad is

heralded as “leader of the American Negro and the beloved leader of we who follow him.” Moreover, it outlined the duty of every Muslim, stating “[f]or him we lay down our lives. We swear allegiance to no other leader or combination of leaders. Remember that!”¹²¹ It also included a sketch of the officials of the mosque and the intricate information and responsibilities of each position. Furthermore, it is comprised of an introduction to M.G.T.& G.C.C. definitions and goals, that describe the meaning and origins of the group and briefly delineates the expectations and purpose of the course:

“In this class you will be trained to face and fulfill your obligations as a sister and help to shoulder the responsibilities by reproducing the good which the religion can produce in you . . . One of the purposes of the M.G.T is to teach our women and girls how to be good housekeepers, how to fulfill their roles as wives and the mothers of the future generation.”¹²²

The Nation of Islam was committed to the training and development of its women so that they would no longer be exposed to the exploitation of whites, particularly in the domestic sphere. The point of any domestic training within the MGT was instead to become “experts” in helping to develop themselves and their families mentally, emotionally, spiritually and physically from within, producing a strong, healthy and confident Nation. The means and methods for “constructing a Nation was through the re-centering of the family.”¹²³

Though the F.O.I. had the greater responsibility for selling *Muhammad Speaks*, the M.G.T. were also encouraged to assist in getting the paper out to the masses of Black people:

Sister when you take it upon yourself to help the brothers sell this paper, *Muhammad Speaks*, you’re helping to resurrect the dead bones, the dry bones that Ezekell spoke about in the valley. So get

behind your newspaper sister and remember it bears the name of God, and contains that which our people are so vitally in need of. You are actually carrying the word of God. When you help sell this paper you are bearing witness there is no God but Allah and the HONORABLE ELIJAH MUHAMMAD is his last and greatest Apostle.¹²⁴

Other significant community information transmitted through the M.G.T. orientation program consist of aims and principles of Islam, key attributes of a “civilized women,” prayer times, opening and closing prayer, dietary laws, general orders and instructions about donations. “Charity is a principle of Islam second only to prayer” and is one of the five principles of faith.¹²⁵ As it relates to charity, each Temple had several treasuries. The M.G.T. and F.O.I. each had their own coffers; there were several reserves for each official and her staff. The Central Point “treasury might be likened to the treasury of the federal government; it is the treasury that runs [the] nation.”¹²⁶ Women and men developed “Poor and Sick Committees” to assist struggling families, while each Temple also had specific funds set aside for use for “the poor and needy of [the] nation.”¹²⁷

Like the orientation process, the M.G.T. teachings were for members only.¹²⁸ Some of the classes offered included extension on basic instruction in the 3R’s but also extended to the *Supreme Wisdom*, food preparation, penmanship, spelling, starting a business and other lessons including reading of all Nation materials such as the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper.

The F.O.I. and Junior F.O.I. were less imaginative from my perspective. We did a lot of drilling and calisthenics but my sisters and Junior M.G.T. they had um, cooking, health, self awareness, money management, they had poetry, they had um, some semi-

academic type of activities, science. Um, their training was more eclectic but again this is my interpretation.¹²⁹

The M.G.T. were uniquely connected to the homebuilding efforts as women functioned as Nation recruiters and frontline activists, selling papers, engaged in security efforts, money management, providing rites of passage for young girls to move from girl to womanhood, and production of goods. The national and regional bazaars were a way for entrepreneurs to showcase their wares and the skills they obtained from M.G.T. Sister Captain Intisar stated that women sold everything “from pampers to pearls.” This gave women economic freedom and allowed them to actualize the skills they were obtaining, particularly those who did not work outside the home on a regular basis.

The Nation of Islam was extremely disciplined in all areas as a result every Muslim was presented with a list of “Do’s and Don’t” as part of their instruction. I will share a few here to provide examples of what appears to be laid out for women in particular:

Do’s

Eat one meal a day

We ask questions when we don’t understand.

Carry complaints and suggestions through the proper channels

Sell Muhammad Newspapers and all mosque products

It is up to the individual . . . the woman should be careful in her selection of a husband, because she must be sure that he is the man to bring happiness to her home.

Wear proper length dress and teach daughter the same

Wear sleeves below elbow in public

Practice and improve handwriting, cooking, sewing, speaking ability and other acquired skills.

We breast feed our babies

We submit to our husbands as long as he is right

Whenever a new sister comes into the Mosque we try to do our best to make her feel at home.

Keep an interest in politics and world affairs

A sister discovers what can be done instead of grumbling about what cannot

Make it a matter of principle to attend all meetings regularly. You can't participate unless you are physically present.

Don't

We do not give baby showers

We do not turn the other cheek. We are not the aggressors, but we fight with those who fight with us. Muslims fight to the finish, or death.

We do not handle personal bank checks

We do not use aluminum cookware. We use glass, stainless steel and Corningware.

Do not go bare legged

Do not wear makeup or cosmetics (pork and chemical based).

Don't gossip and spread rumors.

Don't wear slits in skirts . . . we wear pleats.

Don't wear hats

Don't eat fresh bread . . . at least 24 hours old before we eat it.

We do not practice any vices, gambling, swearing, drinking, intoxicants, using dope, perverted sex or love making, adultery or fornication.

We do not submit to unrighteousness in mosque or out.

We do not go to any of the devil's amusements such as movies

Don't steal, fight each other.

Don't criticize unjustly without cause

Don't be careless of duties to home, mosque and job.¹³⁰

These instructions were compiled to place Muslims within the healthiest and most productive environments, and to enable them to carry themselves in the best manner in order to raise the consciousness of themselves and their progeny.

By using the M.G.T. to build a strong archetype of womanhood through teaching and learning about a wide range of topics including childcare, discipline strategies, breastfeeding, prenatal care, natural birth control, moral responsibility, proper preparation and storage of foods, medicine, health, and spiritual growth and development, women functioned as core drivers of every facet of the Black experience. They were deans of the process for Black children and newly

registered women to re-envision themselves and cultivate their Black consciousness. The household was an important part of Nation women's activism as the home was viewed as the most fertile ground on which to build and solidify strong relationships, parent-to-parent and parent-to-child. While most scholars might gloss over or dismiss the importance of this area, my research found that women and men of the Nation found the household an important, if underexplored, part of their activism, and of a similar magnitude as their more public accomplishments in the community like owning Muslim businesses or attending universities.

While women shared the responsibility of rearing children with their helpmates, they were ultimately responsible for the educational and spiritual training of the household. Women taught prayers, the principles of Islam, Nation laws and policies, Supreme Wisdom, health and beauty, character development; all of the elements of what it took to be a responsible and upright woman or man. Women were considered the first teachers of their children and as such had to be knowledgeable in a variety of subject matter particularly in Math and Science, the group's special need areas.¹³¹ Nation women reclaimed the home from welfare and dependency and single-handedly took over the education of their children. They also were taught basics in grooming, home management, budgeting, proper conduct related to marriage and courting and religious instruction. These initiatives were crucial components to building the Nation's cohesiveness and black consciousness.

The M.G.T.'s Vanguard was for women 18-30 years of age who showed exception potential and leadership. It seems the Vanguard appeared some time in the late 1950s or early 1960s. The Vanguard was a unit within the M.G.T and was comprised of the most exceptional women. It was likened to some kind of special forces. "Vanguards were considered to have a life and character that made them above . . . it was a position of distinction."¹³² As an extension of the M.G.T., the Vanguard was extremely important to women's development and instruction. The program was created to aid in cultural refinement and discipline and provide young women with another way to feel empowered as they were the most elevated of all women in the Nation. The Vanguards, Muslim women soldiers and the first line of defense were viewed as the strongest, most intelligent and poised women of the community.¹³³ Vanguards according to Captain Intisar are "the women who we wish to put out front as representatives of our general body of women . . . they are trained and groomed in physical as well as mental development."¹³⁴ In yet another set of instruction, these women receive physical education, speech, humanities and etiquette.

Nation of Islam women were powerful drivers of black consciousness during the era of black consciousness from 1945 to 1975. Through diet, education, strategies to instill proper behaviors, elimination of delinquency and minor illnesses associated with poor diet and significant change of lifestyles, they assumed community work as recruiters and frontline activists. Nation of Islam women were extremely visible in the everyday functions of the society, working in the offices, schools and other Muslim owned businesses. Many owned their own

stores, some were nurses or cooks and many were educators. Women shared the responsibility of rearing children with their helpmates utilizing the training both parties received in M.G.T and F.O.I. They taught the young and single women to be independent thinkers, not to tolerate bad behavior or abuse, to get an education, learn their history, and dress modestly and with pride. They taught children to become good Muslims and upright and useful citizens of the Nation. NOI women were the vanguards of the community, and they demonstrated their activism in a number of ways promoting and preserving the Nation as few could. Women in the Nation of Islam were not alone in their work toward racial uplift, social justice and responsibility; they stood on common ground with other Black women during the period who also shared these goals though different in their ideological approaches.

The Other “Sisters in the Struggle”

In an effort to place Nation of Islam women in the continuum of Black women’s activism during the post-World War II era of Black consciousness, this segment juxtaposes the work of Ella Baker and Daisy Bates, the quintessential integrationist women of the 1950s and 1960s, with their Muslim self-determinist counterparts. Ella Baker was by far one of the most remarkable women of the 20th century.” If there are architects of the Civil Rights Movement, she [Baker] is one of them.”¹³⁵ As an integrationist, Ella Baker was extremely important to the Civil Rights movement as early as the 1950s although she was active in the NAACP since the 1930s. Accordingly, Baker advised the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, SNCC, organized the Freedom Summer project in

Mississippi, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, SCLC Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, MFDP, in Atlantic City and worked for Work Progress Administration, WPA. She became director of NAACP offices nationwide and by 1954 she was President of New York NAACP.¹³⁶

Daisy Bates played a similarly pivotal role in the Civil Rights movement from the mid 1950s through the 1960s. Like Baker, Bates had a long history of service, becoming President of the NAACP in Arkansas in 1952. With her husband she founded and wrote for the *Arkansas State Press* in 1941, one of the early and influential Black owned newspapers. She was famously heralded as a civil rights heroine as the result of her work in coordinating and supporting the integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas a few years following the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision of 1954.

Though historically they have been considered in opposition, self-determinist and integrationist were essentially focused on the same outcomes for Black people—securing freedom, justice and equality for the community. While the Nation of Islam was not a proponent of integration, it was also a steadfast opponent of segregation. They drew the distinction as follows:

We are as much against segregation as you are. We reject segregation even more MILITANTLY than you do. We want SEPARATION but not segregation.” As defined by the Nation of Islam “segregation is when your life and liberty is controlled (regulated) by someone else. To segregate means to control. To be segregated means to be controlled by others. Segregation is that which is forced upon inferiors by superiors; but SEPARATION IS THAT WHICH IS DONE VOLUNTARILY BY TWO EQUALS . . . As long as our people here in America are dependent upon the white man, we will always be begging him for jobs, food, clothing, and housing . . . and he will always control our lives, regulate our lives, and have the power to segregate us . . . As long as [the Black man]

is dependent upon [the White man] [he will] control his life, limit his movement, his liberty, his very behavior . . . as well as his choice of friends. This is a form of segregation.¹³⁷

The Nation was committed and unabashed in their desire for separation, which in their view equated to self-determination:

As soon as my son grows up and begins to think he is a man himself, equal with me . . . He separates from me. This doesn't mean he is anti-father or anti-me . . . but his mental maturity makes him realize he can't stay in my house, dependent upon me, and expect me to accept him as my equal. [Therefore] He leaves my house and sets up a separate house for himself. He starts a family for himself. And, by being able to provide the necessities of life for himself and his family, he proves that he is independent of me. His ability to make himself independent of me makes him equal . . . His separation and departure from my home has placed him out of my jurisdiction, and by his own initiative he has become independent of me. He now has everything for himself that I have for myself. Now we are both equals.¹³⁸

Proponents of integration assert that desegregation will create racial balance in all areas and thus achieve equal opportunity and inclusion for Black people. Essentially, integrationists believe that by closely aligning the interest of Black people with white people, then the tide will raise all boats so to speak, finally securing access to excellent education for Black children.¹³⁹ Reminiscent of earlier conflicts between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois, an analysis and juxtaposition of the viewpoints and activism by Black women in the area of education during the evolution of the era of Black consciousness will allow us to unearth the important voices and contributions Nation women.

Self determinists and integrationists shared a core set of priorities including: concern for their local communities; active engagement in community involvement through boycotts, writing or speaking; and a focus on participating were directly transforming and improving Black people nationwide. In each

instance, these women drew down on the historical reservoir of experiences prior to 1950 in community development pioneered by Black women like Addie Waites-Hunton, Septima Poinsette, Mary Church Terrell, and Mary McLeod Bethune.

As advocates for freedom, justice, and equality, Nation of Islam women stand firmly within the continuum of important contributors to uplift Black people and achieve social justice, right alongside Bates, Baker and other women who occupied the ranks of groups like the National Council of Negro Women, National Association of Colored Women, the Urban League, NAACP and SNCC. Similar to Civil Rights women, Nation women boycotted stores that were not Black owned, even establishments that sold dangerous and unhealthy products like liquor and cigarettes, which they felt were highly detrimental to the progress of the Black community.¹⁴⁰ Like their counterparts of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People anti-lynching campaign, the women in the Nation helped track and keep record of the atrocities--physical, economic, educational and health-related crimes perpetrated by whites against Blacks. This was most evident in Nation women's contributions to the community newspaper *Muhammad Speaks*, akin to Baker's contributions to the *Crisis Magazine* and Bate's to the *Arkansas State Press*.

When one tends to think of Nation of Islam women, activism is certainly not the most common term that has been associated with them. However, as we have seen in the last few chapters Nation women are very much core agents of Black consciousness and activism. While Nation women were not typically visible

in “street” activism they nonetheless demonstrated and agitated in their active work in education, nation building—the specific positive growth and development of the Black Muslim community—as well as a long range of other activities, including and especially their managing of and contributions to *Muhammad Speaks*, the heralded newspaper of the Nation of Islam. If we take a moment to slightly recalibrate our understanding of activism, I believe that we will finally be able to acknowledge the various important contributions of Nation women to the accomplishments of the Black vanguard, like Baker and Bates, during the evolution of the post-World War II era of Black consciousness.

What Nation women did was just as significant in moving the Black community toward educational, political, and economic liberation as their integrationist counterparts whom have been widely celebrated. Though Nation women’s activism generally took place within the confines of the Nation of Islam, it is important to note that the Nation of Islam operated as a significant, though autonomous “continent” within the broader Black world. Thus, while much of the Nation’s activism was primarily directed towards its own membership, it by proxy, though just as often directly, affected the larger Black community, specifically through the educational and economic institutions.

Unlike Baker and Bates in their efforts to tear down segregated public establishments, the Nation women did not walk the streets to picket or boycott businesses that abused or refused to serve Blacks. Yet, the Nation women nonetheless organized and mobilized in a way to combat these issues in a manner that was just as effective. While the ideology of integrationists drove

them to seek the upliftment of the Black condition by wrestling with the wider white's society's view of Black worth and humanity by demanding dignified and equal treatment from white people in the use of white peoples' institutions, businesses, and the like, Nation's self-determinist philosophy led them to focus their activism on improving the Black condition by agitating and organizing Black people to dignify and honor themselves to instead boycott those businesses, white and Black, who sought to destroy Black people from within their own minds and bodies. For example, Nation women asserted that the problem was not that white businesses discriminated against Blacks by refusing to serve them. Instead, the larger and more sinister problem was the sheer eagerness with which white enterprises were all too willing to sell the Black people products and services that were extremely detrimental to the health and survival of the Black community, namely pork, liquor, cigarettes and other potentially life threatening products.

Women in the Nation in charge of selling ads for *Muhammad Speaks* would refuse to secure advertisements from any of the economically prosperous marketers of cigarettes or liquor. Nation women would also canvass businesses located in various Black neighborhoods to secure information on the type and quality of products sold, store conditions, and made price comparisons between various businesses who sold the same merchandise, all of which to ensure that the Black community was not being exploited or duped by these merchants.¹⁴¹ Reports were typically made available in the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper,

under “Buyer Beware.” utilized by the NOI and the broader Black community in an effort to help support and advance the health of the community.

Another avenue of more direct dissent relates to the Nation’s potential to organize and mobilize extremely fast to aid someone from the Black community in distress, particularly one of their own, who had been victimized by police or other authorities. All available members, both women and men assembled to convene on the perpetrator(s) of the act. Over the course of its history, several incidents involved Nation of Islam adherents, both women and men, who were dispatched to stand against the assault of one of their own. One such instance occurred in New York where Nation followers would not stand down in the face of a probable police assault—women and men alike, according to Sister Dela and Sister Melvina, stood ready to give their lives for freedom, justice, and equality. Like civil rights protesters, Muslim women physically put themselves in harms way.

Integrationists, like Baker and Bates, participated in marches and demonstrations like the March on Washington an important and peaceful act to secure the right to vote for Black people that ultimately demonstrated unity across racial lines on this front. As Baker and Bates canvassed the South to enlist voters under the lights shined by the mainstream media on civil rights efforts there, Muslim women did less visible, though no less critical, work within the community. Nation women’s activism was more localized, utilizing home and school to help raise the consciousness of their children and community, creating structures and enterprises they would be able to control and direct. From the

Nation's perspective, socioeconomic independence was the most powerful form of protest. Instead of organizing coalitions, Nation women sought to create businesses and jobs for the community. Muslim women who sold *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper not only took part in helping to solidify the Nation but also secured additional wages. Women opened their own businesses such as clothing stores and bakeries during a time when such 'activism' by women was rare in the wider community.¹⁴²

Baker and Bates have been widely celebrated as activists who worked hard to secure equal education opportunities for Black children by advocating for equal access to already existing majority white schools. Likewise, Nation of Islam women sought to create equal, if not superior, educational opportunities for Black children, by fostering autonomous Black schools and educational programs like Muhammad University, M.G.T. & F.O.I. Nation women created their own text--- *Muhammad's Children: A First Grade Reader*—providing jobs for teachers, securing property and developing the surrounding community as part of "slum reform." The Nation's reaction to the historical mistreatment and mis-education Blacks received in white directed schools was a bold attempt to re-educate the community's children on their own terms.

What Bates and Baker inevitably share with Nation women is the understanding that Black children deserve better facilities, resources, textbooks, quality teachers, access and equity. Bates believed the most successful way to obtain these things was by way of inclusion into majority white institutions. Nation of Islam women wanted the same thing, but instead promoted the idea of

construction of majority Black schools having the U.S. government provide reparations through land and other resources to aid in the building of a Black community's own autonomous institutions. Nation parents, many products and victims of poor public schools in the South and North, argued that relinquishing control of the education of Black children to whites would result in the same great disservice and devastation they have already experienced.

While often times integrationist and self-determinist women took different routes, had different processes, methods and solutions for obtaining freedom, justice and equality for the Black community, still they each sacrificed and labored in the cause to liberate and uplift Black people. Both Baker and Bates wanted to secure the benefits of freedom, justice and equality, through educational or grass root work, this they shared with their other "sisters in the struggle," Nation women. Where Baker's work as a community activist allowed her to combat the issues and problems that impacted Blacks on the ground, so too did Nation women in their concrete efforts to develop healthy, safe and empowered Black families and communities with the homebuilding programs and Muhammad University school system. Bates, as an advocate and journalist through the *Arkansas State Press*, shares a commitment and dedication with Nation women to "raising their voices" about issues that concern them and the wider community through *Muhammad Speaks*. Yet, time and again Nation women have been excluded from the historical accolades for and acknowledgement of their contributions enjoyed by their integrationist counterparts who have been widely celebrated. It is clear from our discussion

here that it is long past time that this is rectified and these Nation women given their due. The next chapter explores how women addressed the social concerns that plagued the Black community during the 1960s and 1970s.

NOTES

15. ¹ Doris 9X, "We Must Educate the Character," *Muhammad Speaks*, December 3, 1971,
- ² *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook*, 1968.
- ³ Ibid, "Motto."
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ *Muhammad University Yearbook*, 1971.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook*, 1973.
- ⁸ Muhammad's Temple of Islam, *The Messenger Magazine*, 33.
- ⁹ Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America*.
- ¹⁰ The Fruit of Islam (FOI) is the group specifically for the Nation men and the counterpart to the MGT. Only members can take advantage instructions/teachings. The FOI has been extensively explored in many previous works. As such, the MGT is specifically explored as it was the main and most vital women's group within the community. Therefore, this chapter offers an extensive description of the MGT.
- ¹¹ Each scholar who has written on the NOI has only discussed the MGT in terms of cooking and sewing and the FOI militarily without envisioning them as part of the broader educational system of the community.
- ¹² Muhammad, *Black Muslim Millennium: A Brief History of the Nation of Islam*, 18.
- ¹³ See an array of images from 1961-1975 in *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper with various international dignitaries visiting the University of Islam and Clara and Elijah Muhammad's home.
- ¹⁴ The Council of Independent Black Institutions (CIBI) was founded in 1972. See also E. Curtis Alexander, *Elijah Muhammad on African American Education: A Guide for African and Black Studies Programs*, 75 and 94-96.
- ¹⁵ The Nation's homebuilding program and subsequent schools "were the ideological predecessors of both the Black Nationalist independent education movement of the 1960s and the . . . Afrocentric education movement [of the 1990s]." Hakim M. Rashid and Zakiyyah Muhammad. "The Sister Clara Muhammad Schools: Pioneers in the Development of Islamic Education in America." *Journal of Negro Education* 61, no. 2 (1992): 178.
- ¹⁶ "Moto," *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook*, 1968.
- ¹⁷ "Muhammad Speaks," *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook*, 1971.
- ¹⁸ Na'im Akbar, *Know ThySelf* (Tallahassee: Mind Productions & Associates, 1998), v.
- ¹⁹ Harold Cruse, *Crisis of The Negro Intellectual* (New York: New York Review of Books, 1967), 565.
- ²⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Education of Black People: Ten Critiques, 1906-1960* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), 198.
- ²¹ Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education Of The Negro* (New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc., 1990), 137.
- ²² Ibid, xiii.
- ²³ Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult among Negro Migrants in Detroit," 900 and 902-903.
- ²⁴ Pitre, *The Educational Philosophy of Elijah Muhammad: Education for a New World*,
- 23.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Alexander, *Elijah Muhammad on African American Education: A Guide for African and Black Studies Programs*, 93.
- ²⁷ Brother Harold, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, June 2008.
- ²⁸ Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult among Negro Migrants in Detroit," 901-903.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ "History of Nation of Islam," *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook*, 1968; Imam Muhammad, interview by author, Chicago, IL, October 2007. Rashid and Muhammad, "The Sister

Clara Muhammad Schools: Pioneers in the Development of Islamic Education in America," 178-185.

³¹ Edward Royce, *The Origins Southern Sharecropping* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); R. Douglas Hurt, ed. *African American Life in the Rural South, 1900-1950* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003); Painter, *Creating Black Americans: African American History and Its Meanings, 1619 to Present*, 149-150.

³² Jane Elizabeth Dailey, *The Age of Jim Crow: A Norton Casebook in History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009); Peter H. Irons, *Jim Crow's Children: The Broken Promise of the Brown Decision* (New York: Penguin Group, 2002); Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 145-146.

³³ Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America*, 31-32 and 43.

³⁴ Islamic principles--The five pillars, Islamic declaration of faith--Shahada and Islamic dietary laws see Abdalati, *Islam in Focus*, 11, 106-107.

³⁵ See Lincoln, *Black Muslims in America*; Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism, A Search for an Identity in America*; Clegg, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad*.

³⁶ "History of the Nation of Islam," *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook*, 1973.

³⁷ "History of Nation of Islam," *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook*, 1971.

³⁸ Clegg, *An Original Man: Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad*.

³⁹ *TIME*, 25.

⁴⁰ Compulsory Education Code. Act 132, Section 367.2. August 1919 in *The Compiled Laws of the State of Michigan*, vol. 2 (Ann Arbor, MI: Ann Arbor Press, 1948).

⁴¹ *New York Times*, "Negro Cult School in Detroit Closed," *New York Times* (1857-Current file), August 15, 1959, <http://www.proquest.com.proxy1.c1.msu.edu/>; Nation of Islam Documentary, "A Historical Look At the Honorable Elijah Muhammad." By 1975 there was at least one NOI Temple in every major city North, South and West.

⁴² *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook*, 1973.

⁴³ Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America*, 350.

⁴⁴ Bother Harold, shared that in order to get a number assigned to your Temple you had to have at minimum 50 registered Muslims. This number is confirmed by Essien Udom's work. Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America*, 146.

⁴⁵ Brother Harold, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, June 2008.

⁴⁶ Sister Majidah, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, January 2008; Sister Intisar, interview by author, Richmond, CA, April 2008.

⁴⁷ Sister Arafah, Principal, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, December 2007.

⁴⁸ "A History of Our School," *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook*, 1973.

⁴⁹ Evanzz, *The Messenger: The Rise and Fall of Elijah Muhammad*; Clegg, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad*; Ross, *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*.

⁵⁰ *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook*, 1968.

⁵¹ "History of Nation of Islam," *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook*, 1973; *Chicago Defender*, "Hint Muslim Parents Could Be Prosecuted," May 19, 1962.

⁵² Nation of Islam Documentary, "A Historical Look At the Honorable Elijah Muhammad"; Imam W.D. Muhammad, interview by author, Chicago, IL, October 2007. Alexander, *Elijah Muhammad on African American Education: A Guide for African and Black Studies Programs*, 79.

⁵³ The number of followers have been estimated at 100,000 or a quarter million. No one knows the exact number of followers involved in the Nation much like today there is no way to know how many Black Muslims are in the U.S. See Roy L. Brooks, *Integration or Separation? A Strategy for Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 152; Sister Arafah, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, April 2007. Although the yearbook is national every school did not participate in contributing to the publication. The fact that the school was highlighted in a major Journal of Education in 1965 suggests that their school system was being recognized. Clemmont E. Vontress, "The Black Muslim Schools," *Journal of Phi Delta Kappa*, Professional Fraternity for Men in Education, (1965): 2.

⁵⁴ Most schools in the country were going through a process of reform. The NOI was no different as it expanded its educational philosophy to include additional training in business and the higher Sciences. Science Fairs became a mandatory part of the curriculum after mid 1950s.

⁵⁵ Rashid and Muhammad, "The Sister Clara Muhammad Schools: Pioneers in the Development of Islamic Education in America," 179.

⁵⁶ The NOI challenged their students, particularly those who attended public schools, to challenge the teacher and the curriculum thereby taking nothing at face value. They also did not use just standard textbooks but supplemented lessons through research and other data sets. The public schools supported this after World War II marking a turning point for public education. There was a move toward de-centering the authority of the teacher. An overall of textbooks was also under review. "Teachers and textbooks were no longer to be 'unquestioned distributors of truth; they were, instead, to be questioned, tested, and doubted. The role of the student was to shift from passive consumer to active producer of concepts and generalizations, so that teacher-pupil relationships and the ways teachers imparted knowledge would have to be changed." David L. Elliott and Arthur Woodward, eds. *Textbooks and Schooling in the United States* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 47.

⁵⁷ James E. Blackwell, *The Black Community: Diversity and Unity* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975), 104.

⁵⁸ Sarah Mondale and Sarah B. Patton, eds. *School, the Story of American Public Education* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 135.

⁵⁹ Melba Pattillo Beals. *Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir to Integrate Little Rock's Central High School* (New York: Pocket Book, 1994).

⁶⁰ James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 193. "Black southerners in general did not receive public secondary education until after World War II" In the late 1880s and 1890s poor Whites started to advocate for schools, Anderson, 26. In late 1900s according to Anderson children were workers alongside their parents, Parents who did send their children to school were doubly taxed to support their schools and White schools, 27, 148 and 184. "Schools were a central component to any community and a "source of employment for African American professionals."

⁶¹ Mondale and Patton, *School, the Story of American Public Education*, 144

⁶² As quoted in Mondale and Patton, *School, the Story of American Public Education*, 163.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 145.

⁶⁴ Maulana Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies* (California: University of Sankore Press, 1993), 166-168.

⁶⁵ See Sonya Sanchez critique of the public schools. Sanchez and Kelly, "Discipline and Craft : An Interview with Sonia Sanchez"; Vontress, "The Black Muslim Schools."

⁶⁶ Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, 12

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 3 and 7.

⁶⁸ Brother Yasin, interview by author, Detroit, MI, October 2008.

⁶⁹ Alexander, *Elijah Muhammad on African American Education: A Guide for African and Black Studies Programs*, 79.

⁷⁰ Vontress, "The Black Muslim Schools," 87.

⁷¹ "Sister Beverly Maurad, National Director," *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook*, 1971.

⁷² *S.F. News Bulletin*, "All Moslem Temple Worshippers Searched, Black Supremacy Drive Gains Foothold Here, 'Photostated letter given to Neophytes,'" October 12, 1960.

⁷³ Elijah Muhammad. "What Is Un-American?" *Muhammad Speaks*, December, 1961.

⁷⁴ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X as told to Alex Haley*.

⁷⁵ Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in American*; Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom*, Vol. 1.

⁷⁶ Sister Melvina, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, June 2008.

⁷⁷ Louis Lomax, *When the Word Is Given: A Report on Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, and the Black Muslim World*, 51; Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 124.

⁷⁸ Sister Barbara, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, June 2008.

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- ⁷⁹ *M.G.T. Orientation Brochure; The Nation of Islam, Nation of Islam Ministry Booklet, Muhammad, Message to the Blackman.* It appears according to some adherents that during the mid 1970s there was less regiment and accountability in learning some of these lessons.
- ⁸⁰ Actual Facts are part of the lessons or supreme wisdom given to each new member of the Nation of Islam so that they become acclimated to the teachings.
- ⁸¹ Student Enrollment is a lesson provided to new members as part of their initial instruction and is considered part of Nation history.
- ⁸² The white man identified as the true colored man was seen as grafted from the black man and therefore seen as and popularly addressed as the devil or skunk of the planet earth. *Muhammad Speaks*, "Woman In Islam," January 1962, 19.
- ⁸³ *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook*, 1973.
- ⁸⁴ Sister Salimah, Musician, entertainer and community activists.
- ⁸⁵ Sister LaVenia X, "To the New Junior Class," *Muhammad University of Islam. Yearbook*, 1968.
- ⁸⁶ *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook*, 1968.
- ⁸⁷ Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America* and Curtis, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1975*.
- ⁸⁸ Rashid and Muhammad, "The Sister Clara Muhammad Schools: Pioneers in the Development of Islamic Education in America," 178. After World War II education system was in flux. The progressive era although at an end the "progressive heritage were revived . . . and survived into at least the 1970s . . . Subjects such as English and social studies or mathematics and science were presented together in order to take advantage of their interrelationships, and in the later interest in open education." See Elliott and Woodward, *Textbooks and Schooling in the United States*, 43.
- ⁸⁹ The NOI was no different than other private or religious schools who separated the sexes. However, unlike many of their counterparts, girls and boys were encouraged to learn the same academic subjects including hard Sciences and Math. "The separation of males and females in training was reflective of Muhammad's view on maximizing learning opportunities with minimal distractions." Alexander, *Elijah Muhammad on African American Education: A Guide for African and Black Studies Programs*, 28.
- ⁹⁰ Curtis, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1975*, 154.
- ⁹¹ Muhammad's Temple of Islam, *The Messenger Magazine*, 4; *Chicago Defender*, "Hint Muslim Parents Could Be Prosecuted." Educational official were attempting to close school down because of curriculum.
- ⁹² Brother Lovell, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, November, 2007.
- ⁹³ Ibid.
- ⁹⁴ Brother Rafiq, Interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, April, 2007.
- ⁹⁵ Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America*, 244-245.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid, 238.
- ⁹⁷ *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook*, 1971.
- ⁹⁸ Sister Arafah, Principal, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, December 2007.
- ⁹⁹ Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America*, 240 and Stanley Axelrod, "The Treatment of the Negro in American History Textbooks" *The Negro History Bulletin*, xxix, no. 6 (1966): 135.
- ¹⁰⁰ As quoted in Brent Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience*, 196.
- ¹⁰¹ Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America*, 240.
- ¹⁰² Imam Muhammad, interview by author, Chicago, IL, October 2007.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid, 243.
- ¹⁰⁴ Muhammad's Temple of Islam, *The Messenger Magazine*, 3-8.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 3.
- ¹⁰⁶ Interview with Brother Lorenzo, Philadelphia, PA, December, 2007.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁸ Female students discuss their lofty ambitions to pursue degrees in higher education throughout the Nation's yearbooks.

¹⁰⁹ Brother Rafiq, conversation with former Sister Clara Muhammad Student, December 2008; Alexander, *Elijah Muhammad on African American Education: A Guide for African and Black Studies Programs* 79-80. It is important to note that the NOI schools were teaching advance courses and serving high school students prior to public schools before World War II particularly majority Black schools. For example astronomy was not taught in K-8 until after World War II. Elliott and Woodward, *Textbooks and Schooling in the United States*, 46.

¹¹⁰ Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America*, 234.

¹¹¹ Muhammad's Temple of Islam, *The Messenger Magazine*, 1.

¹¹² *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook*, 1968.

¹¹³ Ross suggests Clara Muhammad "helped establish the MGT & GCC," however, this is inaccurate as the MGT, like the FOI, was established by W.D. Fard and later implemented and further developed by Clara and Elijah Muhammad. Ross, *Witnessing and Testifying, Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*, 147.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 156.

¹¹⁵ As quoted in Ross, *Witnessing and Testifying, Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*, 156.

¹¹⁶ Curtis, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1975*, 84.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 147.

¹¹⁸ Muhammad-Ali, *The Evolution of the Nation of Islam*, 62.

¹¹⁹ Brother Harold, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, June, 2008; Brother Rafiq, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, April 2007; Sister Intisar, interview by author, Richmond, CA, April 2008.

¹²⁰ Taken from "The Foreword" *M.G.T. & G.C.C. Your Orientation Brochure*, Muhammad Mosque of Islam. This booklet is given to all new members of the Nation of Islam once they received their "X." See also references to NOI as a cult in J. Milton Yinger "Religion and Social Change: Functions and Dysfunctions of Sects and Cults among the Disprivileged (Lecture I) *Review of Religious Research* 1 no 2 (1963): 65-84, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3510365>.

¹²¹ "A Thumbnail Sketch of Our Leader and Teacher The Honorable Elijah Muhammad," *M.G.T. & G.C.C. Orientation Brochure*, 1.

¹²² *Ibid*.

¹²³ Brother Lovell, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, December 2007.

¹²⁴ "Muhammad Speaks Newspaper," *M.G.T. & G.C.C. Orientation Brochure*.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, "Charity Discussion," *M.G.T. & G.C.C. Orientation Brochure*.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*.

¹²⁷ "Charity Discussion" and "General Orders," *M.G.T. & G.C.C. Orientation Brochure*.

¹²⁸ Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America*, 248.

¹²⁹ Brother Lovell, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, December 2007.

¹³⁰ This is given to new recruits coming into the NOI.

¹³¹ Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America*.

¹³² Brother Lovell, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, December 2007.

¹³³ Sister Intisar, interview by author, Richmond, CA, April 2008.

¹³⁴ Sister Intisar, Regional Captain of East Coast, "What is A Vanguard," *The Vanguard of Muhammad Mosque No. 12 Miss Vanguard 1975 Brochure*.

¹³⁵ Ross, *Witnessing & Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*, 32.

¹³⁶ Lynne Olson, *Freedom's Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830-1970* (New York: Scribner, 2001), 141-150; Shyrlee Dallard, *Ella Baker, A Leader Behind the Scenes* (New Jersey: Silver Burdett Press, 1990), 102, 107.

¹³⁷ *Muhammad Speaks*, "Know the Difference, Separation OR Segregation," May 1962, 16.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*.

¹³⁹ This is a synthesis of definitions utilized from the following texts concerning integration. "Desegregation" Current Issues: Macmillan Social Science Library (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2003). Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center. Gale. Michigan State University Libraries.

<http://find.galegroup.com/ovrc/infomark.do?&contentSet=GSRC&type=retrieve&tabID=T001&pro>

dId=OVRC&docId=EJ3011400066&source=gale&srcprod=OVRC&userGroupName=msu_main&version=1.0; Tushnet, Mark, "Integration." *Civil Rights in the United States*, ed. Waldo E. Martin, Jr and Patricia Sullivan (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2000). *Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center*. Gale. Michigan State University Libraries.
http://find.galegroup.com/ovrc/infomark.do?&contentSet=GSRC&type=retrieve&tabID=T001&prodId=OVRC&docId=EJ2338230868&source=gale&srcprod=OVRC&userGroupName=msu_main&version=1.0; Leonard Steinhorn, *By the Color of Our Skin: The Illusion of Integration and Reality of Race* (New York: Dutton, 1999), 3-8.

¹⁴⁰ Brother Rafiq, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, April 2007; Sister Hattie, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, May 2008.

¹⁴¹ Sister Hattie, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, May 2008.

¹⁴² Alexander, *Elijah Muhammad on African American Education: A Guide for African and Black Studies Programs*, 70-73.

Chapter 5

“Raising Her Voice:” The Contributions of Women in *Muhammad Speaks* Newspaper, 1961-1975

The time has come for all intelligent Negro Leaders to recognize the POWER OF THE PRESS . . . to realize that THE PEN IS MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD”¹

The Black press in the United States has a long and diverse history, undergoing its share of ebbs and flows. Since 1827 there have been well over 4,000 Black newspapers published.² While some newspapers were conservative, others proved more militant or nonconformist. The early part of the 20th century the Black press offered a variety of publications including literary, political, and religious newspapers such as the *Freedom’s Journal*, *The Messenger*, *The Detroit Tribune*, *Crisis Magazine*, *The Chicago Defender*, and the *Pittsburg Courier*.³

By the 1940s, the Black newspaper industry had expanded and a variety of viewpoints were presented to the Black community particularly concerning the best course of actions to address race relations. My review of press materials during this period revealed that although the Black press routinely represented diverse viewpoints, many publications tended to champion one of two dominant worldviews with respect to government social policy and political action: one conciliatory and placating, and the other critical and contentious. This dichotomy was most obvious during times of war, and perhaps never more than during the years following World War II. This war had a tremendous influence on the vulnerability of the Black press as Black newspapers came under considerable political scrutiny by the government as a result of the “Red Scare” The United

States government hinted at concerns that the Black press was being used as an organ for propaganda by communists' factions operating within U.S. borders and thus sought to curb any media attacks that appeared critical of the United States government and its policies. Once outspoken, in effect critical and contentious, newspapers received enormous pressure to curb their messages, with many editors capitulating out of the fear of being labeled communists or communists' supporters. Some editors went as far as eliminating any negative press coverage on the United States government, especially concerning race relations.

Yet, despite this pressure, a few Black newspapers and publishers remained steadfast in their traditional coverage (and criticism) of the United States government, poignantly holding the government accountable for failing to "[fulfill the] promise[s] made during World War I and World War II to end the oppression of its Black citizens" who too had fought to make "the world safe for democracy" for everyone.⁴ One of the most uncompromising publications during the post-World War II period was *Muhammad Speaks*, the newspaper published by the Nation of Islam. Following on the heels of the *Chicago Defender* (1905), and the *Pittsburg Courier* (1910), *Muhammad Speaks* provided a forum for both trained and untrained writers alike, each of whom were called to contribute to the wider dialogue concerning Black people and the social unrest of the time.

Perhaps most interestingly, *Muhammad Speaks* offered a platform for a great many Muslim women, an opportunity that was possibly largely unavailable to either their Black or white female contemporaries. This chapter takes a close look at the articles and writings of the women in the Nation of Islam in this

outspoken periodical, giving us an opportunity to locate and explore the sociopolitical ideas they embraced and the historical context that shaped those views. By scrutinizing the writings by, for, and about women in *Muhammad Speaks* from 1961 to 1975, we have the chance to revisit the philosophy and perspectives by, for, and about” women as they navigated the Nation and the wider Black community. My findings reveal that these women were not the “silent and passive bystanders” alleged by several scholars who have written about the Nation.⁵ Instead, women in the Nation of Islam made their voices heard loud and clear, contributing to *Muhammad Speaks* and critically raising and responding to topics and issues most significant to the Black Diaspora.⁶

The chapter is comprised of three segments. Part I provides an overview of the history and goals of the Nation’s newspapers, and the sociopolitical milieu in which women “rais[ed] their voices.”⁷ The second section explores the broader themes women commonly engaged in their writing, particularly through the lens of the following framing questions: what subject matter did women in the Nation of Islam most often concern themselves with; how does the paper evolve during this time in relation to women’s issues; and how do their writings help complicate our understanding of the significance of women within the Nation. Finally, the third segment explores how these women’s writings and voices participated in the global dialogue surrounding Black consciousness and liberation.

Origins and Background of the Nation of Islam Newspapers

In 1934, the Nation of Islam created and distributed its first publication titled *Final Call to Islam*. Though the *Final Call* did not enjoy a long run, it helped

the Nation to establish its underlying reasoning for producing their own publication: to spread the socio-religious message of Elijah Muhammad to a larger audience (domestically and internationally); to persuade more people to join; to provide a written record of the atrocities and crimes of whites in America; to help immortalize their community life and accomplishments; and as part of a larger economic plan to maintain ownership and operation of all industries (including the press) within the community.

In 1960, Elijah Muhammad appointed Dan Burley, former editor of both the *Chicago Defender* and the *Chicago Crusader*, to produce and edit a publication for the Nation. Although not a member of the Nation, Burley was a known supporter of the group.⁸ The NOI typically provided jobs for both community and non-community members as they employed those who were qualified and aligned with their doctrine. Richard Durham, another widely respected journalist, followed Burley as editor of the paper, with John Woodford (a writer for *Ebony Magazine*), later replacing him. After Woodford, came author and Professor Leon Forrest, and then finally Askia Muhammad, the “first registered Muslim editor” who took control in the late 1960s,” and now writes periodically for the *Final Call*.⁹ There was no woman appointed as editor of the newspaper from 1960 to 1975.

With a solid team of journalists editing the paper, 1961 marked the debut of *Muhammad Speaks*.¹⁰ This new monthly paper was touted as “an extension of Elijah Muhammad’s column in the *Pittsburg Courier*, the *Los Angeles Herald Dispatch*, the *Chicago Defender*, and the *Chicago News Crusader* . . . and was

said to have had a circulation of over 500,000.”¹¹ Once *Muhammad Speaks* began circulation, men (and some women) were tasked with selling the paper door to door and on street corners.

Sister when you take it upon yourself to help the brothers sell this paper, *Muhammad Speaks*, you're helping to resurrect the dead bones, the dry bones that Ezekell spoke about in the valley. So get behind your newspaper sister and remember it bears the name of God, and contains that which our people are so vitally in need of. You are actually carrying the word of God. When you help sell this paper you are bearing witness there is no God but Allah and the HONORABLE ELIJAH MUHAMMAD is his last and greatest Apostle.¹²

During its first few years, *Muhammad Speaks* was referred to by its editors, with the approval of Elijah Muhammad, as a “militant monthly dedicated to Justice for the Black Man.”¹³ After a little more than a year, it began circulation on a weekly basis, with its heading changed to “Dedicated to Freedom, Justice and Equality for the So-Called Negro.” The twenty-to-thirty page publication covered both national and international news concerning not only Nation of Islam activities, but also events in the wider community throughout the African-Asian Diaspora. Both Muslims and non-Muslims, men and women, Blacks and other minority groups, contributed to, were featured in, and purchased the periodical even though it appears the majority of the articles were by, for, and about Black people. Journalistic contributors to *Muhammad Speaks* covered a number of issues associated with the teachings and programs of Elijah Muhammad, and provided articles about and related to Black history, Black pride, the Civil Rights movement, police brutality, and international news. The paper included notices for self-determinist initiatives including employment

opportunities and promotions for Black businesses and products (like “Joe Louis” milk). It also featured “model” Muslim families and highlighted individual triumphs, including Muslim children who were winning awards or doing well in school. Interestingly, the paper even provided a platform for disparagers of the movement—letters, editorials, and articles from detractors, particularly people in the Civil Rights movement who opposed the Nation, were generally included. Images were critical to communicating perhaps the subtext of the Nation, and how they viewed the political scene of the period.

Every issue contained a number of positive and uplifting messages to the wider Black community, including: “We must make jobs for ourselves”; “We Respect and Love Our Women”; “We Must Control Our Neighborhoods”; “Children Must Be Prepared”; “The Black Woman is the Mother of Civilization”; “We Must Have Some Land”; “Know Yourself”; and “We Must Go For Self”¹⁴ These slogans of Black consciousness and nationalist ideology were used to help facilitate the re-envisioning and re-education of the “mentally dead so-called Negroes” and were taken up in the late 1960s and 1970s by advocates of independent Black schools and education¹⁵

Contributions to *Muhammad Speaks* often referenced a diverse set of data including statistics and government information to support their claims. For instance, in an article titled “As Blacks Integrate, Whites Vacate,” the piece highlighted the increase in the percentage of whites fleeing from the cities to the suburbs as Blacks began to integrate once majority white neighborhoods. The author of this article identified various cities where this phenomenon was fast

becoming a trend, providing charts and dates that helped map this sociopolitical development over time.¹⁶ In an editorial coined, “We Charge Genocide”, the writer quoted Articles II and III adopted by the United Nations on December 9, 1948 for the “Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.”¹⁷ The reporter accused the Los Angeles Police Department and by extension the United States government, with committing crimes of genocide against Black people. Other striking articles include: “Starvation Still Stalks Half of World’s 3 Billion Population”; “Black Man Not Safe in Civilized U.S.”; “Exempt Negroes from Taxes”; and “Will the U.N. Stop Race Murders in South West Africa.”¹⁸ Regular features in the paper also included: “Women in Islam”, “Muslim Women in History”, “News & Notes About Women”, “News Briefs From Around the World”, “For and About You”, “Portrait of A Professional”, “Natural Beauty”, “Let The Buyer Beware”, “What the Muslims Want and Believe”, and “What Islam Has Done for Me”.¹⁹

Although other Black periodicals such as the *Crisis Magazine*, the *Black World*, *Jet Magazine* and others discussed and debated the underlying causes and possible solutions to issues that plagued the Black community, in some instances many editors tolerated the kinds of product advertisements in their publications that the Nation believed contributed to the downward spiral of Black community. The editors of *Muhammad Speaks* refused to allow any advertisements for cigarettes, liquor, pork or any other products they deemed harmful to Black health—the Black community, particularly in large urban centers

were plagued with chronic disorders caused by drug use, alcohol abuse, and poor diets each the accoutrements of the impoverished.

The Historical Context: Duty-Bound to Raise Their Voices

From the late 1950s to 1970s Black people lived under the constant shadow of calamity—the result of centuries of discrimination and oppression, the Black community faced crisis on numerous fronts: health, employment, housing, and education.²⁰ Across the country, particularly in the North and Midwest, disease, drug use, unemployment, urban squalor, and crime soared, threatening the Black community's survival.²¹ The following is a brief survey of several of the most noteworthy issues and controversies of the time that would eventually prove the catalyst for a number of articles and editorials written by women in the Nation of Islam's publication:

Health

The late 1950s to mid-1970s were replete with matters related to Black health. One of the most devastating controversies was the now infamous Tuskegee Experiment, a “project” that lasted from 1932 to 1972.²² This experiment permitted large numbers of Black men infected with Syphilis to go untreated even when a cure became available. The “syphilis study is but one stop on a long journey of pernicious medicine involving Black Americans that reaches back to experimentation on slaves to eugenics, (sterilization) practices in the second half of the last century.”²³ This type of abuse and mistreatment undoubtedly contributed to the growing suspicions of Blacks of the medical field,

erecting psychological barriers that would prevent many members of the community from taking proper steps in health prevention, care and maintenance.

Reproductive Rights

The negative impact of the Tuskegee Experiment did not confine itself to generic health matters. Soon family planning issues, namely medically induced contraception, were implicated, and the distrust of the medical profession heightened even more as a seemingly targeted effort to limit the birth rates of Black women emerged. Indeed, Planned Parenthood efforts generally directed toward poor Blacks.²⁴ Viewed as an assault on the Black family, and thus the future of the Black race, the idea of the threat of genocide by birth control was considered in a number of publications during the period particularly the 1969 essay by Toni Cade Bambara called "The Pill: Genocide or Liberation?"²⁵ Essentially, Bambara considered the rift between men and women over the underlying function of birth control in the Black liberation movement. This essay addressed the means and methods of Black genocide by way of reproductive repression. Birth control was positioned in opposition to an exercise of self-determination by Black people as a group, and more synonymous with a limitation of "Black sexual autonomy."²⁶ For Muslim women in the Nation this was a particularly alarming issue, as it signified a coordinated effort by the white establishment to curb the growth and proliferation of Black families, and therefore the Black community, anathema to a community working hard to strengthen and develop itself.

Education

Since the 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, educational opportunities for Blacks appeared to worsen during the period immediately following. The resulting busing of Black children to majority-white schools in an effort to help speed the process of integration presented even more significant problems for Black children, their families and communities.²⁷ Issues included but were not limited to curriculum that was unabashedly bias and outright racist, the beginning of the decline of Black teachers, the possibility of children being attacked by hostile white students or outright alienated.²⁸

The sheer depth and breadth of the issues affecting the Black community during this era was substantial, often disproportionately effecting Black women. As these sociopolitical concerns were discussed and debated women in the Nation of Islam loudly and confidently added their voices to the chorus of those engaged in the dialogue that ranged across the Black Diaspora.

Black World Affairs

Nation policy strongly encouraged Nation of Islam women to “keep an interest in politics and world affairs.”²⁹ Although the decolonization of Africa began after World War II, white domination of the world was still a reality. As a result, most of the 1960s and early 1970s were a critical time in Black History not only in the United States but also throughout the Black Diaspora. As a developing Nation looking for powerful alliances outside of the borders of the United States, the NOI dispatched delegations and/or *Muhammad Speaks* reporters to extend well wishes and plant the seed of the possibility for future

global partnerships with newly independent countries and their leaders. Likewise, the Nation attempted to build possible global bridges to enhance their socioeconomic ambitions. Although men were the editors of the paper, numerous women were correspondents and reporters on domestic and international affairs such as Harriette Muhammad and Bayyinah Sharieff. The global black consciousness movement toward self-determination helped to further legitimize and popularize Clara and Elijah Muhammad's community as maintainers of that legacy within the United States. Their self-determinist economic and educational success undoubtedly played a role in helping to build worldwide relationships while producing small enclaves of international members.³⁰

Contributions “By” “For” and “About” Women

The Black woman is the mother of civilization. She is the one who instills within the child the elements of measure, reasoning and greatness . . . Today the black woman must give proper care and training to her own.³¹

As “mothers of civilization,” Black Muslim women are central to all areas of community development including the newspaper. The dialogue surrounding the pressing issues of the era for Black people found its voice in the Black press, and the women of the Nation of Islam enjoyed and took advantage of the opportunity to participate meaningfully. There were numerous women who contributed to the newspaper throughout its history but only a few who consistently wrote over a significant period of time. As discussed, the Nation's publication, *Muhammad Speaks*, served as a major driver of the discourse concerning how Black people would confront the issues involving Black people with solutions generated and enacted by Black people. As active and engaged members of the Nation, women

were frontline drivers of this journalistic enterprise; they contributed to the newspaper from its inception, and “each . . . became both a journalist and . . . activist, using her position to advocate . . . for her race, for her sisters, and for humankind.”³² Subjects explored were extremely diverse, ranging from “pearls to pampers,” local to international, and cooking to safety.

In many ways, women took a holistic approach to the issues facing Black America in both the public and private sphere. Although not formally trained as journalists, women who wrote for *Muhammad Speaks* held pragmatic occupations such as wives, artists, educators, nurses, and mothers. As non-formally trained journalists, Nation women became part of a long tradition of Black women journalists like Ida B. Wells-Barnett, editor and writer for the *Free Speech* and later the *New York Age*; Maria Stewart, who wrote for the *Liberator*; Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin pioneer in the club movement and founder of the publication the *Women’s Era*; Amy Jacques Garvey, the helpmate and “mouthpiece for the UNIA;” and countless others.³³ While there are very few texts written about the contributions of Black Muslim women to the journalistic arts during the mid-twentieth century, like these forerunners, it is imperative to note that women of the Nation of Islam raised their voices about the injustices of their time. Women in the Nation of Islam were Black-conscious Muslims and their interests encompassed a “community first” worldview.³⁴ This vision consisted of the resurrection or “restoration” of the development of the sociopolitical and economic success of Black people through unity, self-determination, and collective work. Accordingly, the broad themes addressed by, for, and about

women within the pages of *Muhammad Speaks* focused on education, issues of identity, healthcare, Black history, religion, international affairs and activities specific to the home. Though men also wrote on many of these issues as well, it was the women who primarily addressed these core-value areas that affected consciousness-raising.

“Love the Skin You’re In:” Black Women and Issues of Identity

Black identity was extremely significant during the postwar years as the growing mass of Black Muslims sought to carve out their own ways of viewing themselves and the wider Black world. While white women were the standard-model of beauty in the United States, and one many Black women aspired to accept, Muslim women placed themselves in active opposition to these normative ideas of womanhood and attractiveness. Essentially, Black Muslim women discarded normative white standards of beauty and sought instead to elevate the natural beauty of Black women. Of course identity was very much tied to equity of the sexes and the understanding of the gender capital each carried within the community and/or society. A Black woman in the Nation understood that she is Muslim—the way she carries herself, dresses, speaks, thinks and engages her partner or any other Muslim speaks to the level of her beauty and the inherent equality to which men and women must show deference and respect. The same is true for the Muslim man.

Learning to “love the skin you’re in” is one of the most important aspects of being a Muslim woman. For some women it was very difficult to cover their hair, limit their makeup, wear long attire and conform to a beauty that required

inner strength rather than outward markers of attractiveness. The shift toward natural Black beauty was extremely challenging for women particularly because they had taken on a complex about their looks as their beauty was continuously in question. In this regard, several works within *Muhammad Speaks* written by women and men targeted Black consciousness as it relates to conventions of physical acceptance and unattractiveness, fashion, intelligence and the like. For instance, an article titled “Are Fashion and Beauty the Same?: Fashion is Seasonal but Beauty is Eternal” the author asserted:

It would seem that the desire of most women is to be admired for her beauty. So we see the result in the indiscriminate dash for fashion . . . [Yet] all Black women were endowed with the basic material for a true beauty. A mind, heart, and body already fashioned by the Perfect Creator. We have only to develop them to their fullest beauty . . . Not distort or disregard them so much that they change seasonally with Paris. You may argue that the mind does not enter into it, but it certainly does . . . You do not need fashion . . . You as a Black woman need only a few basic rules to be beautiful . . . cleanliness internally and externally at all times for cleanliness is next to Godliness. Modesty is a woman's most valuable asset. It makes her far more noticeable and interesting then (sic) does the frequently almost naked fashion we see in the streets daily. Last, but not least, naturalness.³⁵

The writer suggests that Black Muslim women are also preoccupied with image, identity and the matter of self-esteem. However, this was not a new fixation given the legacy of Madam C. J. Walker. As a beautician, Walker was responsible for a significant turning point in Black women's grooming by developing alternative ways to care for the hair and skin.³⁶ Like Walker, Nation women attempted to etch out a different space for themselves by formulating their own values and beliefs around issues of beauty. Nation women saw beauty as something that

encompassed the physical, mental and spiritual, which moves them outside the normative white models of beauty which privilege and elevate the physical. Walker is said to have argued, “to be beautiful . . . does not refer alone to the arrangement of the hair, the perfection of the complexion or to the beauty of the form . . . To be beautiful, one must combine these qualities with a beautiful mind and soul; a beautiful character.”³⁷ Throughout their writings, Nation of Islam women attempted to promote the sentiments offered here by Walker while simultaneously responding to the overwhelming and persistent stereotypical images of Black females as unattractive, unfeminine, aggressive, lazy—in other words, not women.³⁸ By rejecting the taxonomy of American white normative modes of beauty, Nation women created their own Black identity and ideas of attractiveness emphasizing character and skill. Their responses took the form of writings geared towards influencing other women’s perceptions about image and self-esteem as illustrated in dress, behavior, and mindset. Featured titles of formal writings and poetry included: “For Blackwoman Beauty is a Standard”; “The Muslim Woman is Model Personality”; “The Beauty of Being Black”; “Through Islam Confidence Replaces Her Uncertainty”; “Black Beauty”; and “Black Woman Most Beautiful Woman in the World”.³⁹ A discussion of beauty may seem inconsequential, “but when considered in light of constant white supremacist assaults on notions of black beauty, it is of profound significance [especially during apex]”⁴⁰

Also in relation to beauty, Edwin Moss composed an article about women and make-up, titled “Wallace Muhammad Says Women not forbidden to Make

Up: Son of leader Gives Low down on Make-Up.”⁴¹ Moss posited Muhammad’s views asserting that Muslim women are allowed to wear makeup if they so choose but they should be well-informed about the affects of using it particularly long term. Moss provided data about not only the harmful ingredients found in most make-up during the period but includes the damaging consequences.⁴² Moss writes, “Muslims welcome women . . . to our religious meetings and affairs, with or without make-up, and I do not think anyone can blame us for telling them [meaning women] the truth about face make-up.” Tynetta Deonar also contributed to this dialogue concerning makeup in “Why No Makeup? Cosmetics Produce Two People In One: Not For Our Women”, Deonar essentially discussed the artificiality make up creates thereby hiding the natural beauty of a Black woman. She argued that Black women do not need products to enhance their beauty like their white counterparts; moreover, the products are typically produced with white women in mind. Deonar also considered how the origins of whites contribute to their ideas about beauty.⁴³

It appears that almost every issue of *Muhammad Speaks* from 1961 to 1965 included an ongoing column titled “Natural Beauties or Natural Beauty.” This column attempted to reinforce and promote positive self-images of Black women. The writers of “natural beauty” although unknown identify both non-Muslim and Muslim women who readers believe fit the concept or “idea” of a natural beauty as prescribed by the Nation of Islam. One caption reads, “The beauty of the Black woman is the standard of the world. Women, the world over desire to copy the beauty of the Black woman . . . The Black woman puts herself

in a lower state when she continues to copy after the White man who greatly resents her God-given beauty.”⁴⁴ The so-called beauty of the Black woman has been under scrutiny since her entrance into the Americas and the overwhelming response offered by both men and women demonstrate that during the apex of black consciousness it still held great weight. In addition, these editorials also reflect Nation women desires to create their own ideas of beauty interwoven with Islamic mandates of modesty whereby clothing became not only a political statement but also an outward illustration of a prideful identity. Muslim women exclaimed, “Unity in dress meant unity in mind.”⁴⁵ Although Elijah Muhammad mandated that the length of the dress must come well pass the knee so that women were not exposed, it was Nation of Islam women who borrowed from Islamic and African fashions to create their own uniforms including various colors, styles, and lengths.⁴⁶ In order to move more “freely” particularly in case of danger, many of the outfits that appeared to be dresses were actually pants. Muslim women referred to their attire as “our divine garment.” In addition, they saw their uniform, which Ula Yvette Taylor observed as confining, as garments “designed to represent unity and strength for the Black woman in America. Our skirts are designed for a queen who must be able to sit high on her throne and also prepared to go to battle for her Nation.”⁴⁷ The hats they wore may have been copied after military attire in Asia.

Muslim women made their own clothes and decided on the very long dresses featured in many photos that they borrowed in some ways from other Islamic communities. The diverse attire aided women in their ability to create new

fashions and ideas of attractiveness, and make a reality what Madame C.J. Walker articulated, that beauty was more than the physical; it encompassed the character and spiritual growth of the individual. Alongside identity politics, other themes Muslim women wrote pertained to education, health, home building and other socio-political issues.

“But Some of Us Are Brave:” Black Women on Education

What have you taught your child today
Some nursery rhyme, about beanstalks and hay
Or a more scared thing, like the manner to pray
Or when he is given something, what to say.
Or some facts of the earth when he asked you why
Why the cows give milk, why the blue in the sky
Why during the winter, leaves fell and die
A million times a child asks why.
Think of it mother, what would you say, if asked;
What have you taught your child today.

Sister Wilma Ann⁴⁸

As soon as the Negro learns to look at himself as a possibility he will find a way out of his difficulties. He must abandon the search for treasures from without and must uncover those within. When a man discovers that what he has so far excels that which he seeks, he is experiencing the beginning of knowledge.”⁴⁹

The apex of Black consciousness, from 1965 to 1975, was a turning point in the education of Black children. For the first time in African American history one hundred percent of Black schools in the South and many defacto-segregated schools in the North, at the elementary and secondary levels, were very slowly becoming something of a novelty, causing the majority of Black children by the mid-1970s to contend with majority white teachers and students who were often times hostile to them. Black children were no longer able to go to school in a

relatively safe and nurturing environment with teachers and staff who mirrored them. This period of integration systematically contributed to the intellectual debilitation of Black children such as the rise of remedial classes and the implementation of rigorous “tracking” of Black children.⁵⁰

On the subject of edification, Nation of Islam women contributed numerous writings including: “What have You Taught Your Child Today”; “Islam School’s Expanding Role: Announces New Adult’s Program”; “Dr. Thomas Patrick Warns Against Television Slavery”; “How Well Do You Know Africa?”; and “University of Islam Graduating Tomorrow’s Leaders.”⁵¹ Sister Claretha X, an ongoing writer for the paper, and a public school teacher in Fernando, California, is highlighted in the paper as the esteemed commencement speaker for the graduating class. The text concerns the education Black children receive in the white public school system. In her critique of “Whoever Controls School, Controls Future,”⁵² Sister Claretha makes the connection between slavery and the mental condition of Black people of her day. She argued Black children were educated to accept their condition and inferior status and therefore do not desire to do anything for themselves but instead desire to labor for the benefit of their oppressor. Because of her experiences working within the white public school system, Sister Claretha maintained there was a great need for Black people to invest in the education of their children because without their involvement their children will continue to be indoctrinated into a sense of inferiority. She surmised that Muhammad’s University Of Islam was the “only place where Black children could get a thorough knowledge of themselves.” Consequently she averred:

At the University of Islam our children are grounded in the basic knowledge necessary for future success. By the time they complete their studies here they are on the right road and pointed in the right direction for great achievements.”⁵³

Moreover, she argued, “If your friend controls your education, your friend controls your future. If your enemy controls your education, your enemy controls your future. If YOU control your education, YOU control your future.”⁵⁴ Sister Tynetta added:

The majority of black women of America believe that the white man has everything and that we have nothing. They believe that we everything to learn and to gain from being accepted by them into their society. They further believe that we are unable to exist without the assistance , close collaboration and affiliation with the white communities of America in all areas of human relations . . . White society was designed for the benefits of whites and what we must do is design our own society for the benefit of our own people . . . Our teacher of black inferiority instilled in us a hatred for our black skin and physical characteristics. How can these ingrained feelings of inferiority be destroyed---while white idolatry persists without destroying our entire race and preserving the world an evil memory of a people who died hating themselves and loving to death their teacher of racial hatred and abuse?⁵⁵

Sister Christine, also a regular contributor and trained as a teacher, was Director and principal at the University of Muhammad in Chicago between the late 1950s and early 1960s. Sister Christine published the first formal textbook, titled *Muhammad's Children: A First Grade Reader*. This textbook is extremely complex and uses sophisticated language they may be considered above the grasp of a typical five or six year old even today. Likewise, in one of her more poignant works, she penned, “We Need Our Textbooks.”⁵⁶ Within this composition, Sister Christine targeted public schools, and exposed the deliberate mis-education children receive from erroneous textbooks. She insisted that

successfully refuted historical fabrications were still widespread in the textbooks used in public schools. She maintains that the narrow and one-sided white history impressionable children continued to receive had harmful and long-term consequences. As a result, Sister Christine argues, there is a need for textbooks, written by and about Black people.⁵⁷ This case was again advocated in the independent Black School and Black Studies movements of the late 1960s, 1970s and beyond.⁵⁸ Some of her other works include: "Education of Relief Clients Why is Chicago Afraid?"; "Self Help or Oblivion for the Negro"; "Children Now, Black Self-Determination Committee Brings African History to L.A. Schools"; and "Negroes Fight for Freedom."⁵⁹ This critique of educational indoctrination remains a lynchpin for Nation educational philosophy which asserted:

There is, and has been, in America a national conspiracy to indoctrinate our children with 'white supremacy' propaganda. This conspiracy operates quite openly; it is condoned by most parent organizations, officially approved by school boards and subsidized by Federal, state and local governments. It reaches every school child in the country with its insidious 'white supremacist' literature. I refer to the textbook used in our schools for our children.⁶⁰

Sister Velma X composed the article "Education or Indoctrination."⁶¹ In her critique she urged parents to take a more active role in their children's education by helping their youth understand that everything they read and learn in school, particularly for those unable to attend a Muhammad's University of Islam, is not necessarily true and both teacher and texts should be rigorously questioned. There is a clear support of Black students and parents, particularly Muslim, to challenge teachers who continue to misconstrue information, specifically history.

She wrote, “parents must take the time at home to separate the lies from the truth . . . We must qualify ourselves to help our children by gaining a knowledge of ourselves . . . We must take an active part in the affairs of our children, and the schools which they attend.”⁶²

Sister Audrey Ali added another important work regarding children and education. In “Our Children Among Most Beautiful”, she maintained, “what child can be beautiful if he or she has no respect for his parents, friends, or other people’s property.”⁶³ She goes on, “train and show your children from the beginning . . . early training molds them into fine men and women . . . A young mind is the most receptive to learning.”⁶⁴ Sister Harriett Muhammad, based in Los Angeles, California, wrote the editorial and advice column called “For and About You.” The feature highlighted national and international news and provided both men and women with advice on education, relationships; the advantages and disadvantages of marriage; the rapport between Africans and African Americans; parenting; laws regarding desertion and child custody rights. Countless women raised their voices about the education of Black children and the vigilance parents must have in order to counter any destructive information imparted to children in public schools. Education is a critical site for resistance and it appears it was primary for Muslim women in helping to foster a strong black conscious Nation. Consequently, Christine Muhammad author of the first Muslim textbook and advocate of creating textbooks and the teaching of Black history to all Black children passionately wrote:

The social sciences and history books used in our schools are ‘primers in white supremacy,’ and the longer the child continues in

school the more his mind is patterned after his slavemaster, and by the time he completes training for his bachelor's or master's or Ph.D. degrees, he is a complete replica of his master and has no desire or incentive to change. Therefore, if we are to ever break away from our masters and the spell they've cast upon us, we must act now and start teaching our pre-school and early school age children ourselves. Let them see black, brown, cream and yellow faces when they open their books. Let them become accustomed early in life to the ideas, that he has something to strive for. Let them realize early that they have a history with meaning, and not a meaningless, nebulous something about 'Negro history and how much progress we have made since slavery.' Tell them, with conviction and assurances on your part about their history 'all the way back to Africa, when the white man lived in caves and was a savage, then we won't have to waste time trying to re-educate fools with degrees.⁶⁵

Women Concerning Health and Home

Health and home were interconnected in the Nation community. There were particular physical illnesses associated with living an urban life. The NOI laid out a program of "how to eat to live." Diet played a vital role in maintaining healthy families and the Nation members believed a combination of the right foods prepared in the correct manner prevented severe illnesses that historically plagued the Black community such as diabetes and high blood pressure. As such, there were a number of works offered on the topic, though many times authors remained anonymous. The columns that featured the most about health awareness were "Science and Medicine", "The Kitchen Is Our Medicine Cabinet", "Let The Buyer Beware", and "Muslim Cookbook". In these columns, the journalist discussed diverse topics related to Black health that included articles like "All About Stomach Ulcers"; "What is Bronchitis?"; "We Need Medical Plan to Aid Poor"; "The Common Cold A Costly Mystery"; "Negro Cancer Rate High"; "Food For the Young"; "Avoid Accidents in the Bathroom"; "Life Span of Negro

Baby Boy in U.S. Some 13 years Less Than White Girl”; “Fad Diets Can Cause Malnutrition, Scurvy and Death, Physicians Warn”; “How Will Power Will Pull Weight Down”; In an effort to correlate proper diet with health and wellness Sister Ann 3X posits:

Is there a cure for arthritis, cancer, high blood pressure, etc.? Which one of these gives you the most trouble? You probably have all three and some others that you are not aware of. What is the CAUSE? There can be only one answer: POOR DIET. Mr. Elijah Muhammad teaches us that the kitchen is out medicine cabinet.⁶⁶

Also discussed in the context of physical as well a mental health was issues of morality and injustice. In the column “The Woman in Islam” in January 1962, the writer discussed the moral decline and degradation of the Black woman, both at home and at times even abroad, which by her assessment have been corrupted by whites. She argues, that as a result of living in “a society of modern savagery . . . called America,” immorality has become the “law of the land,” and increasingly impacting Black women. She continues:

America boasts of an excellent governmental system whereby her inhabitants are equal in compliance with the so-called constitutional guarantees of liberty and freedom for all. This has proven a farce. The freedom to commit crimes and get away with it has been and is the order of justice in America . . . Wherever the white man has established his constitutional and governing rule and power such strict laws, which mold and protect a righteous nation and civilization are unheard of . . . the whiteman is the natural peace-breaker of our home . . . he, himself is not capable of living up to such laws.⁶⁷

In the sphere of the home, women offered a great deal of helpful suggestions. Advice on how to keep the house safe was typically featured under household hints. Also covered were cooking utensils that were harmful when cooking such as aluminum. Women gave healthy cooking tips and recipes in

order to expand their life and to be fit. The columns' target audience was often Black women, who not only worked outside of the home but also made time to cook and take care of the family. Family and homecare in general was included in every issue. Though the author names were sometimes absent we can assume since the Muslim program appointed women as primary maintainers of the home environment that women were doing the research and providing the information around these themes. Editorials included: "Handy Shopping Hints Save Time", "Keep New Look in Bath Towels", "Save Fees On Repairs for Appliance and Packaging".⁶⁸

Within these core areas women addressed hygiene, proper childcare, homemaking decorating, cleaning hints, budgeting and food storage and preparation. Women saw home building as a lost art and science that needed to be re-captured, re-centered, and refined. Nation members claim that women received "scientific training in these areas" during M.G.T and G.C.C. instruction. By focusing on areas such as how to cook, educate and discipline children, and eliminate hazards in the home women were providing a safe, clean, and nurturing environment for the entire family---a critical step in Nation building. From the beginning, the family unit was the center of the home building initiative in the mind of all Nation members. Sister Tynetta penned the article "Family Most Powerful Unit in Islam." She wrote, "in Islam there is no stronger more binding working unit than the family . . . The Muslim marriage . . . is . . . a serious matter in Islam . . . it forms the base of the Muslim family. It must be carried out with the utmost sincerity and dedicated efforts of both parties to bring about a successful

union.”⁶⁹ Nation of Islam women and men believed only the correct training, such as the honing of skills in home building, usually taught in M.G.T and F.O.I, could produce a successful and strong home and family, and by extension well equipped, intelligent, and healthy citizens for the Nation.

While not formally trained in journalism, Tynetta Muhammad, became the most common writer of the paper’s “Women in Islam” column. She contributed to Nation of Islam newspapers for well over 30 years, including both *Muhammad Speaks* and the *Final Call*. In her early career, Muhammad usually wrote about women’s issues in the United States and abroad. For example, Muhammad composed articles, titled “Dress Should Identify Black woman,” and “Whites Reject Islam Indian Woman Told.” Muhammad’s editorial titled “Muslim Women in History,” traced the history of Muslim women of the past and also highlighted Muslim women of her day in an effort to eliminate the thinking that the Muslim woman were “backward when history proved otherwise.” Muhammad argued that her column provided what she called “an intelligent approach to the study of Muslim woman.”⁷⁰ Her other writings in *Muhammad Speaks* also included: “Invitation to Black Woman, What is Cultural Refinement, and Beauty of Nature Reveals How Black Man Underestimates Self.”⁷¹ Health and Home were closely linked and integral to maintaining a safe, physically fit and happy family of which women were a vital part.

Muhammad Speaks newspaper evolved during this time in relation to women’s issues. In the early years of its publication although women wrote about a variety of issues it appears in the 1970s articles by and about women

were somewhat reduced in comparison. Women's commentary began to only appear in only a few sections of the paper, "Women in Islam," and other special features. There were also more writings directed toward femininity. Several factors may contribute to this seeming disparity. First, all the editions of the newspaper are not available to view, so the perception of a disproportion may be unfounded. Second, many of the articles were still frequently published without names meaning a man or woman could have penned the article and the distinction became less apparent. Third, this was the beginning of the women's movement and as a rebuff Black Muslim women could have actively decided to remain silent so as not to appear to be aligned with the movement; and fourth, the community may have been beginning its shift into so-called orthodox Islam, which culturally pushes Muslim women from visibility to invisibility in the public arena.

Nation women writings, during this era, undoubtedly help complicate our understanding of the Muslim community and the significance of women within because it offers some critical insight into how women were thinking about the issues they believed hampered the community during the apex and how they helped to contribute to the conversation as core drivers of Black consciousness and by extension community building.

Generally, non-Muslim sympathizers and Muslims were featured in *Muhammad Speaks*. A considerable number of articles concentrated on international affairs, covering news in places like Ghana, South Africa, Nigeria, Sudan, Egypt and the wider Black world. Given the political environment of the

1960s and 1970s, *Muhammad Speaks* stood out from other Black publications because of its nonconformity, outspokenness and arguable political aims.⁷² Throughout the publication, Nation of Islam women from various socioeconomic and educational backgrounds were able to make significant contributions that they most likely would have not been able to do in any other so-called liberatory community. *Muhammad Speaks* was perhaps the most successful Black newspaper post-World War II providing women of all socioeconomic and educational backgrounds with the opportunity to raise their voices for the cause of Black liberation not only in America but also throughout the world.

“On Common Ground:” Nation Women, Global discourse and Islam as a vehicle for Black Liberation

Thus, in this age and day, one cannot but welcome the evolution of a positive outlook in the black world. The wounds that have been inflicted on the black world and the accumulated insults of oppression over the years were bound to provoke reaction from the black people.⁷³

--Steven Biko

Thus in all fields "Black Consciousness" seeks to talk to the black man in a language that is his own. It is only by recogni[z]ing the basic set-up in the black world that one will come to reali[z]e the urgent need for a re-awakening of the sleeping masses. Black consciousness seeks to do this. Needless to say it shall have to be the black people themselves who shall take care of this programme.⁷⁴

--Steven Biko

The philosophy of Black Consciousness, therefore, expresses group pride and the determination by the blacks to rise and attain the envisaged self. At the heart of this kind of thinking is the reali[z]ation by the blacks that the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. Once the latter has been so effectively manipulated and controlled by the oppressor as to make the oppressed believe that he is a liability to the white man, then there will be nothing the oppressed can do that will really

scare the powerful masters. Hence, thinking along lines of Black Consciousness makes the black man see himself as a being, entire in himself, and not as an extension of a broom or additional leverage to some machine. At the end of it all, he cannot tolerate attempts by anybody to dwarf the significance of his manhood. Once this happens, we shall know that the real man in the black person is beginning to shine through.⁷⁵

-- Steven Biko

The Nation of Islam "places a great emphasis upon black consciousness and racial pride, claiming man cannot know another man until he knows his self."⁷⁶ This final segment concerns intersecting experiences of Nation women and other women in the Black Diaspora. Chiefly, it explicates the global Black experience of which Nation of Islam women participated (i.e. the struggle against white social, economic, educational and political hegemony). Through their writings, Nation women established common ground for alliances and coalitions with the wider Black Diaspora. Through indirect, including their struggles in the paper, and direct, sending delegations, correspondence, hosting or employing members of the global black community, dialogues the NOI women were able to perhaps impact black consciousness, identity and culture on both a national and international level. Racial oppression is certainly a global phenomenon that the great majority of Black people have experienced through colonialism, chattel slavery and imperialism. By examining these intra-racial dialogues from the perspective of self-determination one may observe the NOI as not only laying the groundwork but also very much in step with Asian and African countries attempting to secure economic, political, educational and social autonomy during the 1960s and 1970s. The global movement toward Black self-determination, of

which the Nation was arguably a pioneer in the post-World War II era of Black consciousness, was in some ways oppositional to the discourse of civil rights establishment and integration. For example, while civil rights groups were focused almost solely on carving out a space for Black people within established white enclaves. NOI correspondents wrote very strident articles about colonialism and white imperialism and celebrated the independence of their Diaspora brethren asserting, “no longer does the African here ‘praise the wise rule’ of England; if anything at all, he wants the British out from his homeland, and to keep them out,” a sentiment the Nation embraced and desired for their own community.⁷⁷

Global Black leaders, like the Nation, began to unmask and outwardly attack white colonialism, imperialism and hegemony during this heightened period of black consciousness.⁷⁸ In this global effort, implicit and explicit, Black consciousness and self determination became common ground on which to stand in order to solicit Black Diaspora support and coalitions. The Nation of Islam sought to pull from these loosely defined and informal partnerships especially from the Muslim world. According to Lincoln, as of 1961, “there were scarcely 33,000 Moslems in North America, compared with 345,000 in South America, 12 ½ million in Europe and more than 400 million in Africa and Asia.”⁷⁹ It is with this broader community that the Nation actively attempted to align itself. The Nation was rumored to have the support of the United Arab Republic who extended invitations to Nation of Islam Muslims to visit Egypt under the leadership of President Gamal Abdel Nasser.⁸⁰ Moreover, Muhammad was

alleged to have had Japanese support during the early days of the Nation.⁸¹

Likewise, there were a number of teachers and other individuals who held significant positions in the Nation from abroad including Sister Lily, Afro-British, Sheikh Diab, Palestinian Arab, Abdul Basit Naeem, Pakistani, Theodore Rozier, Haitian, Professor Ali Baghdadi, Egyptian, and many others.⁸² Abdul Basit Naeem in his writings draws correlations between the work of the NOI, and what he observes as the “ultimate solution to the world’s cumbersome, persistent and perplexing problems.” He goes on to describe the Muslim program under the Nation as “the panacea for all ills afflicting humanity.”⁸³ C. Eric Lincoln argued that “The Muslim leader [Elijah Muhammad] . . . had powerful friends abroad to sponsor and receive him, and this extended to his followers.”⁸⁴ Muhammad Ali, world champion and professed Muslim, also helped to expand the Nation’s popularity not only among other nonwhites, but also with international Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Sister Bayyinah Sharieff, columnist in *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper, wrote about her experiences in Sudan for over three years under the title “Life in the Sudan.” At the Savior’s Day address of 1975 Professor Ali Baghdadi announced to the Nation adherents:

The Nation of Islam is connected to 600 million Muslims in the East. Elijah Muhammad touched many lives. His loss was felt in Middle East and their hearts are with the faithful followers of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. The success of Islam was carried by him. We are one Body and all the body feels pain and reacts. We love you because you love Islam. You have become the Freedom Fighters of Islam. Soldiers of Allah. Muhammad Ali stood in ring and put Islam on the map internationally.⁸⁵

When it comes to the Diasporic relationships between Black Americans and the rest of the nonwhite world, Black Muslims in America posited that:

Islam recognize[s] complete equality of Brotherhood; a Muslim is truly the brother of another Believer, regardless of how black the skin or how kinked the hair. He is welcomed with sincere and open arms and recognized by his light-skinned or copper-colored Arab brother. He is also recognized in the same way by his brown or yellow-skinned Japanese, Chinese and Indian brothers. Can you say this for your Christianity . . .? No, your slavemasters' religion does not recognize equality of brotherhood.⁸⁶

In the 21st century, American Islam is generally viewed as the new “Evil Empire,” the millennium’s communists; subversive and counter to American life, values and culture.⁸⁷ Yet according to scholars, “Islam has a long . . . history in America.”⁸⁸ Some scholars allege the very first Muslims came prior to Christopher Columbus. Later Muslims came as enslaved Africans to work the land.⁸⁹ Whatever its origins Islam for Black Americans did not gain prominence and stability in American society until after World War II. Nor was Islam widely practiced in other parts of the Americas or Caribbean until after this period. What separates early American Islam from postwar Islam is a “distinct black Islamic [theology] of liberation . . . Islam [came] to be a vehicle for a separate national quest as well as an Afrocentric spiritual path for a growing body of African-Americans.”⁹⁰ Consequently, it was this message of liberation and resistance that ushered in the era of Black consciousness, 1945-1975, interestingly considered the end of the era of “the White devil” by Black Muslims.⁹¹ The Nation of Islam used its Islamic platform of “freedom, justice and equality” for all Black people to help build coalitions with Jamaica, Egypt, Bermuda, Peru and the like. In relating the NOI delegation visit to Jamaica in 1974, Charles 67X and Alonzo 4X report:

More than 200,000 Jamaicans lined the streets of Kingston as a 20 car motorcade twisted through the capital city to an official welcoming ceremony at the government's National Arena. During the ceremony Prime Minister Manley lavishly praised the works of Mr. Muhammad, [stating] "The Honorable Elijah Muhammad leads one of the most remarkable movements in the world . . . "We are proud of his work. And you let him know that this prime minister of this proud country would be very honored to welcome him as our guest at any time"⁹²

In 1956 and 1957, the Nation of Islam was featured in the international magazine *The Moslem World and the U.S.A.* edited by Abdul Basit Naeem. By 1975 the Nation had adherents, sympathizers and supporters in Barbados, Bermuda, China, England, Egypt, Ghana, British Honduras and Japan; and Nation delegations had been sent all over the world extending the greeting from Muhammad in an effort to build international alliances between the non-white nations.⁹³ As such, a critical assessment of the relationship between the Nation of Islam and other nonwhite nations is important to explore.

Contrary to what some scholars have suggested, the Nation of Islam saw the struggle of the Black man in America inextricably tied to the fate of all nonwhite people, particularly Muslims, in the rest of the world. Throughout the apex of black consciousness, members of the Nation had strong interests in African affairs and were greatly concerned with the political climate of various African and Asian countries. In the 1940s, the Nation of Islam was designated as a pro-Japanese sect by government enforcement agencies, thereby considered enemies of the state.⁹⁴ In the 1950s, Elijah Muhammad sent two of his children to study Arabic in Cairo, Egypt thus paving the way for a coalition with a critical Muslim regime, under President Abdel Nasser. In the 1960s, the Nation of Islam

sent a delegation to Ghana following its independence. Although it is not clear, just how significant the relationships were between the Nation of Islam and newly Black liberated societies what is clear is that they both shared the same objective concerning the elimination of European-American sociopolitical and economic imperialism. Nation literature was replete with references to Africa and other parts of the Afro-Asian world particularly Egypt, Ghana and Tanzania. Muslim women and men traveled abroad as successful models of what Muslims in America had accomplished even under the banner of social, intellectual and religious oppression and economic slavery. Given their growing international popularity, made possible by not only Elijah Muhammad's message and economic success but also ministers like Muhammad Ali and representatives like Bayyinah Sharieff.

Scarcely explored by scholars, Ali became an international giant in the 1960s assisting with the promulgation of Islam. Assisted by the popularity of individuals like Ali, the alliances the Nation of Islam tried to develop with leaders of the nonwhite world was done not only with small delegations but also through utilizing *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper as the international mouthpiece of the community, parading the success of the Nation's education and economic programs. Women as contributors to the newspaper, schools and economic initiatives assisted with solidifying sought after alliances. In providing information on their synopsis of what was occurring in the world concerning Black people, and to help correlate the work of the NOI with other nonwhite nations in the rush for self-determination they list in the column titled "Up to Date" stating that Algeria

[is] “a nation of people determined to own their own land and govern themselves; Panama [is] a nation of dark men determined to own their own land and govern themselves; [The] United Nations [is] a place of utter confusion, intrigue; a Dracula created and supported by West; Syria there is a yet a sound to be heard from this land of the black man in the surging path of Islam; and [in] South Vietnam there was a time Admiral Perry and Marc Polo when the nonwhite was in peace.”⁹⁵

Women in the Nation of Islam appeared to have a strong interest in African-Asian relations. Although their messages at times seemed mixed, for the most part it appears Nation women respected, admired, and felt a connection with women of African-descent throughout the African-Asian Diaspora. For instance, in the article titled “Afro-Asian Women in UN,” the author discusses women in the United Nations, and maintains that although these “Asiatic” women were from a variety of countries they did not allow language, customs or other obstacles to get in the way of working together for a similar cause—the eradication of discrimination and oppression. The author also acknowledged several African women from Nigeria and Niger for their work and contributions in the United Nations on behalf of all Black women. In the July 1962 article, the journalist highlighted the first woman, Ella Koble Gulama, to hold a cabinet post in Sierra Leone. The correspondent, champions her as the first woman to hold a Minister’s post in West Africa.⁹⁶ In the August 31, 1966 issue of “Women’s News and Notes,” the author discussed the rising support of women by leaders in Egypt, chiefly as a result of President Abdel Nasser. The president, the critic

argued, opposed the more conservative views of his contemporaries regarding women's public roles. Postulating that Nasser was supportive of Egyptian women's rights, the author contends the President encouraged women to become more active in social and political activities. In the remainder of the text, the writer discusses women's newly politicized views and their increased organizing efforts, perhaps taking cue from Nation women.⁹⁷

An editorial titled "Women of Africa in America," featured in "Notes and News About Women", featured women in New Guinea. In this article, the reporter once more calls attention to the growing public roles of women in Africa. According to the writer, Guinea, a former French colony, was the "fastest-advancing nations in the world," and had therefore raised the educational and health standards for all its citizens, especially women.⁹⁸ In "Women of Africa in U.S. Part II", published in April 1964. Again, women from various African countries were noted for their works and achievements, as well as their UN efforts to end racial discrimination throughout the world. The author acknowledged Judith Imru of Ethiopia and Florence W. Addison of Ghana for their "sympathy and encouragement to their Negro brothers and sisters who are struggling in America for freedom, justice and equal opportunities."⁹⁹ Other articles "by," "for" and "about" women in the African Diaspora included: "Tanganyikan Students Speak of Women in Zanzibar"; "16 Nigerian Women in U.S."; "First Women Officers in Sierra Leone Army"; "Portrait of A Crusader: Highest Ranking Women in Egypt, Dr. Hekmat Abou Zeid"; "Women: Africa's Unsung Heroes"; and "Men of Africa Pledge Aid in Negro's Fight for Freedom";

“Women Fighters in Asia. “Women in Africa Seek Closer Ties With Sisters in America”.¹⁰⁰ In the last mentioned article, the author Harriett Muhammad’s attitude is representative of Nation women’s writings about Africa in general, and the Black world in particular when she writes,

The increasing empathy, and understanding between Africans and Afro-Americans is one of the emerging political factors which the West now must contend with. The artificial separation which existed between Negroes and their African brothers maintained by divisive White supremacy, is now being swept aside by the obvious respect both have for the struggles for freedom being waged by the other.¹⁰¹

Audrey Ali wrote an article titled “Mboya at Freedom Rally.” The article highlights Tom Mboya, Kenya’s African Nationalist party freedom representative, and his attendance at a rally held in New York. Likewise, Harriett Muhammad penned several articles that addressed sociopolitical issues such as: “Tanganyikan Talks of Fossils and the Future;” “L.A. Alderman Answers: Why Negro Defendants and All-White Juries;” and “Why Those Born at the Bottom Usually Die There.”¹⁰²

From 1961 to 1970 the issues that plagued the Black community changed very little health, police brutality, white supremacy, disparities in education and international affairs remained center stage during this period and clearly fundamental to Nation women. Through their prose, it is clear Nation women established common ground for alliances and coalitions with the wider Black Diaspora (i.e. the elimination of white hegemony and the advancement of Black self-determination). By utilizing these dialogues Nation women were able to perhaps impact black consciousness, identity and culture on both a national and international level. Racial oppression was undoubtedly a global phenomenon that

the great majority of Black people experienced. By examining these intra-racial dialogues from the perspective of self-determination we have observed the NOI women being serious contributors to Diaspora affairs and also very much in step with their Asian and African sisters attempting to secure economic, political and social autonomy during the 1960s and 1970s.

The experiences of women in the Nation of Islam, particularly those who wrote for *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper, must be included in the larger field of Black Women's Studies and American History. This inclusion should not simply provide an empty and hollow praise-song, but must correct the record and acknowledge the intentions, advocacy, sacrifices, and agency of Nation women in the broader Black self determinist's movement, all of which were directed toward securing freedom, justice and equality for Black people everywhere.

NOTES

¹ Muhammad's Temple of Islam, *The Messenger Magazine*, 20.

² Charles A. Simmons. *The African American Press, With Special References to Four Special Newspapers, 1827-1965* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 1998), 2-3.

403. Armistead Scott Pride. "The Names of Negro Newspapers," *American Speech*, 29, no. 2 (May 1954):118. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/i21917>.

³ Pride, "The Names of Negro Newspapers," 118.

⁴ Simmons, *The African American Press, With Special References to Four Special Newspapers, 1827-1965*, 81.

⁵ Griffin, "Ironies of the Saint, Malcolm X, Black Women, and the Price of Protection," 218-219; Tate, *Little X: Growing Up in the Nation of Islam*, 86.

⁶ Taylor, "As-Salaam Alaikum, My Sister, Peace Be Unto You: The Honorable Elijah Muhammad and the Women Who Followed Him"; Clegg, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad*; Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, and the great majority of scholars who have written about the NOI have only considered Muslim women under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad as it relates to the domestic sphere.

⁷ Rodger Streitmatter, *Raising Her Voice, African-American Women Journalists Who Changed History* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994).

⁸ There was a "Special Edition" Issue that was released under *Mr. Muhammad Speaks* in September 1960. According to Curtis, "although the Nation of Islam owned and distributed their own paper they employed a majority non-Muslim staff in 1960. Curtis, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1975*.

⁹ Muhammad, "Muhammad Speaks: A Trailblazer in the Newspaper Industry," *Final Call*, March 10, 2000.

¹⁰ There was a Special Edition called "Mr. Muhammad Speaks" in September 1960. *Muhammad Speaks*, 1960 before the paper started its full operation.

¹¹ Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Transition from Separatism to Islam, 1930-1980*, 62; According to Askia Muhammad, in the *Courier* and the *Crusader* the column was called "Mr. Muhammad Speaks" in the *Amsterdam News*, it was titled "The Islam World." The *Observer* printed the teachings of Mr. Muhammad in a series called: "White Man's Heaven is Black Man's Hell." Before *Muhammad Speaks*, these newspapers were sold door-to-door and on street corners throughout the country. Muhammad, *Black Muslim Millennium: A Brief History of The Nation of Islam*, 9-16.

¹² "The Muhammad Speaks Newspaper," *M.G.T. & G.C.C. Orientation Brochure*.

¹³ "Mr. Muhammad Speaks" was the original name of the editorial featured in a number of Black newspapers in the 1950s. It later changed to simply "Muhammad Speaks." Muhammad Speaks, 1961-1963. (front-page). Because of the quality of the microform, some page numbers were unidentifiable. Where page numbers were readable, they are included. If page number is not readable than the month and year is provided. When available a full date is given. Many of the articles in the publication were unsigned. If an author is listed I provide the name. When no author is listed I give title and date or any information provided.

¹⁴ These "plaques" are throughout *Muhammad Speaks Newspaper, 1961-1975*.

¹⁵ Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America*, 39-43.

¹⁶ *Muhammad Speaks* "While Blacks Integrate Whites Vacate," April 33, 1961, September, 1960.

¹⁷ *Muhammad Speaks*, "We Charge Genocide," June, 1962.

¹⁸ *Muhammad Speaks*, June 1962, July 1962, and September 15, 1962.

¹⁹ *Muhammad Speaks*, 1962-1964.

²⁰ Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 25-27, 37-40, 174-175, 211.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Robert G. Weisbord, "Birth Control and the Black American: A Matter of Genocide," *Demography* 10, no. 4 (1973): 571-590.

²³ Michele Goodwin, *Black Markets: The Supply and Demand of Body Parts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 28. Jean Heller, "Syphilis Victims in U.S. Study Went Untreated for 40 Years," 116-118 in Tuskegees *Truth: Rethinking the the Tuskegee Syphilis Study*, ed. Susan M. Reverby, 116-118 (The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

²⁴ Joyce A. Ladner, *Tomorrow's Tomorrow: The Black Woman* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1971), 254; Jennifer Nelson, *Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 57-58.

²⁵ Toni Cade, "The Pill: Genocide or Liberation?" in *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, ed. Toni Cade Bambara (New York: Washington Square Press, 1970), 203-212.

²⁶ Weisbord, "Birth Control and the Black American: A Matter of Genocide," *Demography* 572.

²⁷ Brooks, *Integration or Separation: A Strategy for Racial Equality*; Wicker, *Tragic Failure*; Martin Schiff, "Community Control of Inner-City Schools and Educational Achievement," *Urban Education* 11, no. 4 (1976): 415-428.

²⁸ Backlash from *Brown vs. Board* decision on Black children see Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir to Integrate Little Rock's Central High School*. Irons, *Jim Crows Children: The Broken Promise of the Brown Decision*.

²⁹ MGT "Do's and Don'ts."

³⁰ According to NOI records by 1975 the NOI had followings in Jamaica, Bermuda, British Honduras.

³¹ Muhammad Speaks, "Blackwoman Is Mother Of Civilization," Caption beneath photograph, December 1961.

³² Streitmatter, *Raising Her Voice, African-American Women Journalists Who Changed History*, 3.

³³ Simmons, *The African American Press*; Pride, "The Names of Negro Newspapers"; and Clint C. Wilson II, *A History of the Black Press* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1997).

³⁴ Marcus Garvey makes the assertion in the early part of the 20th century that the agenda of Blacks must begin with Black solidarity or "race first" irrespective of socioeconomic status. See Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association*.

³⁵ Muhammad Speaks, "Are Fashion and Beauty the Same?" April 1962, 22.

³⁶ A'Lelia Perry Bundles, *Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Chelsea House, 1990), 66-67.

³⁷ Ibid, 67.

³⁸ Betsch Cole and Guy-Sheftall, *Gender Talk, The Struggle for Women's Equality in African American Communities*, 200-201; George E. Cunningham, "Derogatory Images of the Negro and Negro History," *The Negro History Bulletin*, xxvii, no. 6 (1965): 126-142.

³⁹ Tynetta Deonar, "Muslim Woman Is Model Personality," *Muhammad Speaks*, January, 1962; *Muhammad Speaks*, "Beauty of Being Black," July 1962. Sylvester Leaks, "The Natural Look Is Reborn in Brilliant New Show Beauty of Negro Womanhood Theme of Naturally '63' Hair Fashion Revue," *Muhammad Speaks*, February, 1963.

⁴⁰ Betsch Cole and Guy-Sheftall, *Gender Talk, The Struggle for Women's Equality in African American Communities*, 220.

⁴¹ Moss on Makeup

⁴² Moss

⁴³ Tynetta Deonar, "WHY NO MAKEUP? Cosmetics Produce Two People In One: Not for Our Women," *Muhammad Speaks*, January 1962, 24.

⁴⁴ Muhammad Speaks, "Beauty of a Black Woman," July, 1963.

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- ⁴⁹ J.J. Rhoads, "Educating the Negro After the Civil War," *The Negro History Bulletin*, (1939): 30.
- ⁵⁰ Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations, Black & White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 191-192.
- ⁵¹ Sister Wilma Ann "What Have You Taught Your Child Today?"
- ⁵² Sister Clarethia, "Gives Graduation Address, Whoever Controls School, Controls Future," *Muhammad Speaks*, April 1962, 12.
- ⁵³ Ibid.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵⁵ Tynetta Deanar "Women in Islam" *Muhammad Speaks*, July 7, 1967.
- ⁵⁶ Christine Muhammad, *Muhammad's Children: A First Grade Reader* (Chicago: University of Islam Press, 1963).
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- ⁵⁷ Elliott and Woodward, *Textbooks and Schooling in the United States*, 44.
- ⁵⁸ See Alexander, *Elijah Muhammad on African American Education, A Guide for African and Black Studies Programs*.
- ⁵⁹ *Muhammad Speaks*, May 1964 and October-December 1964.
- ⁶⁰ Sister Christine, "Self Help Or Oblivion For The Negro," *Muhammad Speaks*. February 1962.
- ⁶¹ Velma X, "Education or Indoctrination," *Muhammad Speaks*, July, 1962, 16.
- ⁶² Ibid.
- ⁶³ Audrey 3X, "Our Children Among Most Beautiful," *Muhammad Speaks*, April, 1962, 24.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid.
- ⁶⁵ Sister Christine, "Self Help Or Oblivion For The Negro."
- ⁶⁶ Ann 3X, "Kitchen Is Our Medicine Cabinet," *Muhammad Speaks*, May, 1962.
- ⁶⁷ *Muhammad Speaks*, "The Woman In Islam," January, 1962, 17.
- ⁶⁸ Louis Walker, "Packaging," *Muhammad Speaks*, October, 1962.
- ⁶⁹ Deneary, "Family Most Powerful Unit in Islam," 8.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid, "Women In Islam," *Muhammad Speaks*, February 4, 1963.
- ⁷¹ Ibid.
- ⁷² Muhammad, *Black Muslim Millennium: A Brief History of The Nation of Islam*, 8-10.
- ⁷³ Biko, *I Write What I Like: A Selection of His Writings*, 72.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid, 32.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid, 92.
- ⁷⁶ J. Herman Blake, "Black Nationalism," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 382 (1969): 15-25, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1037110>.
- ⁷⁷ *Muhammad Speaks*, "Africans Stop Praising Wise Bossism of British Masters!" February 1962, 5.
- ⁷⁸ The Nation of Islam, *Accomplishments of the Muslims*, 1975. Michael Manley praises Elijah Muhammad and Nation of Islam for their work. Richard Daley mayor of Chicago also praises the work of the Muslims as do several other top officials throughout the country. President Abdel Naser and Abdul Basit Naeem all give the NOI praise for their work given the highly racialized and violent milieu of the U.S.
- ⁷⁹ Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 223.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid, 225.
- ⁸¹ Evanzz, *The Messenger: The Rise and Fall of Elijah Muhammad*.
- ⁸² Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 26. Berg, *Elijah Muhammad and Islam*, 107.
- Brother Lovell, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, December, 2007.

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- ⁸³ Naeem, "Sees 'Divine Purpose in the Trials, Humiliation, Suffering of Muslims," *Muhammad Speaks*, July 7, 1967.
- ⁸⁴ Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 226.
- ⁸⁵ Ali Bagdadi Savior's Day Address, The Nation of Islam, "Saviour's Day," DVD, February, 1975.
- ⁸⁶ Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom*, 37.
- ⁸⁷ Gardell, "North America," in *Islam Outside the Arab World*, eds. David Westerlund and Ingvar Svanberg (New York: St. Martin's Press 1999), 420.
- ⁸⁸ Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas*; Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas*; Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum America: Transatlantic Stories and Spiritual Struggles*.
- ⁸⁹ Gardell, "North America," 421; Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum America*, 9-13.
- ⁹⁰ Gardell, "North America," 426.
- ⁹¹ Muhammad, *Our Savior Has Arrived*, 107, 212; Muhammad, *The Fall of America*, 138, 164, 168.
- ⁹² Charles 67X and Alonzo 4X, "Jamaica Government Host Muslim Delegation," *Accomplishment of the Muslims* (1975): 24.
- ⁹³ "Nation of Islam Mourns Elijah Muhammad," *Ebony Magazine*, March, 1975, 79. "Nation Mourns Muslim Leader," *Jet Magazine*, March 13, 1975.
- ⁹⁴ Evanzz, *The Rise and Fall of Elijah Muhammad*.
- ⁹⁵ *Muhammad Speak*, "Up to Date," December, 1961.
- ⁹⁶ *Muhammad Speaks*, "Afro-Asian Women In UN 'Language, Custom Not A Barrier to Understanding One Another,'" December 30, 1962.
- ⁹⁷ *Muhammad Speaks*, December 30, 1963; "African Nation Names Woman to Cabinet Post," *Muhammad Speaks*, July, 1962; *Muhammad Speaks*, "Nasser's Advocacy of More Freedom for Egypt Women Opposes Old Time," September 15, 1962.
- ⁹⁸ *Muhammad Speaks*, "Women of Africa in America," March 27, 1964.
- ⁹⁹ *Muhammad Speaks*, "Women of Africa in U.S.—Part II," April 10, 1964.
- ¹⁰⁰ Harriett Muhammad, "Tanganyikan Talks of Fossil Fuels," *Muhammad Speaks*, May 8, 1964; June 19, 1964; August 1965.
- ¹⁰¹ Harriett Muhammad, "Men of Africa Pledge Aid in Negro's Fight for Freedom," *Muhammad Speaks*, April 24, 1964; *Muhammad Speaks*, May 1964, May 22, 1965, and July 1964.
- ¹⁰² *Muhammad Speaks*, March – May 1964.

CONCLUSION

Every generation has the opportunity to write its own history, and indeed it is obliged to do so. Only in that way can it provide its contemporaries with the materials vital to understanding the present and to planning strategies for coping with the future. Only in that way can it fulfill its obligation to pass on to posterity the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of the past, which, after all, give substance and direction for the continuity of civilization.

--John Hope Franklin¹

“A Nation Can Rise No Higher Than It’s Women:’ The Critical Role of Black Muslim Women in the Development and Purveyance of Black Consciousness, 1945-1975” challenges traditional observations and interpretations about Black women who joined the ranks of the Nation of Islam from the three decades from 1945 until 1975. This study is the first major investigation of a range of Nation of Islam women who were important to the growth and development of the local and national Muslim community. It utilizes a wealth of primary documents that are inundated with evidence that women had a very clear, distinct and often sought after voice in the advancement of the community. The dissertation explores the methods and theoretical framework utilized in the study, a historiography of the scholarship completed on the NOI, what attracted women to the group and made them remain, the critical contributions women made to the development of the Muslim community particularly the educational programs, and a decisive examination of writings “by” and “about” women.

The first-person accounts provided the voices of Muslim women during the era of Black consciousness from 1945 to 1975. The individuals highlighted are

representative of many of the Muslim women who were long-term adherents, and like most early supporters, assisted in developing Nation programs and by extension the community. Based on the primary sources collected in addition to interviews I was able to theorize about why Black women may have joined, remained or left the Nation of Islam by considering the full range of women's experiences highlighted in the dialogues.

This study places women within the context of Africana Womanism, fostering a philosophy of co-partnership and positive if not empowering inter-gender relationships within the group. Such an approach helped contribute to a "community first" ideology, one of the bedrock principles of consciousness-raising. Moreover, equality of the sexes not only in word but also in practice seemed to serve as a strong appeal for women to join the Nation of Islam. In a survey given to research participants, 16 of the 18 or 89 percent of respondents, both men and women, agreed that women were always highly respected within the community. In questions concerning the roles of women, sixteen of eighteen, eighty-nine percent, said men and women roles were comparable or complementary. Likewise, most research participants agree, there was no position a woman was openly discouraged from holding in the Nation.

The study offers the first systematic and detailed analyses of the Nation of Islam's educational programs as intricately tied to the home. This initiative was important because it reflected and embodied an agenda of self-determination, fostered race consciousness, engendered power, spirituality and politics, and intermingled a focused, disciplined, and determined struggle to build thriving,

safe, healthy, intelligent and successful Black families and by extension communities, most of which were directed and managed by women. The education program draws on the homebuilding initiative that both formalizes and legitimizes Black parenting and childrearing. Throughout the history of the struggle for Black liberation, education has functioned as a critical site for protests and revolt against white supremacy. Echoed forcefully and persistently in the words of Clara and Elijah Muhammad, and subsequently their followers, the Nation took the utility of education a step further and positioned it as the central engine for successful community development. Essentially, the Nation placed primary responsibility for this critical task in the hands of its women, in turn making them the core agents of one of the Nation's most meaningful contributions to the struggle for Black liberation---the positive transformation of the self-perception of whole communities.

I offer a general discussion of Nation of Islam women in relation to their contemporaries who filled the ranks of integrationist groups such as Daisy Bates, who played in integral part in the desegregation of schools, and Ella Baker who dedicated her life to working with integrationist groups like SNCC, SCLC and the NAACP. Baker and Bates were two model Civil Rights women who shared the same aims with Nation women for freedom, justice and equality for the masses of Black people.

A critical historical overview of the Nation's newspaper, *Muhammad Speaks*, and the sociopolitical milieu in which women "rais[ed] their voices" was also presented. Explored are the broader themes women commonly engaged in

their writing such as education, health and home, identity and self-esteem. Moreover, women's writings and voices participated in shaping of the Diasporic dialogue surrounding Black consciousness and self determination.

My dissertation uncovers Muslim women's experiences, demonstrating they have been a vital part of this group since its inception, some scholars even suggested they were the first to enlist. Clara Muhammad oversaw the community and ensured its stability during Elijah Muhammad's absences. As a result of this study, Nation women are no longer nameless; we may add others in addition to Clara Muhammad to the annals of Black, Women and Islamic Studies. Women like Tynetta Muhammad, Debra Fayzah, Beverly Maurad, Lottie Muhammad, Christine Muhammad, and Ethel Sharieff, and a host of local women leaders like Sister Intisar, Sister Clotell, Sister Hattie, Sister Halimah, and others who often labored hard to help build and legitimize the Nation of Islam. These women, and many others, expressed their activism using education, entrepreneurship, childrearing and child caring, wifery, leadership and instruction solitarily or in unison. At every step of the community's development women played a critical part as purveyors of Black consciousness. From 1945 to 1975 women evolved alongside the community. As their numbers grew so did the creativity of its members and their desires to do more. Research participants talked about competition between cities of besting one another in order to stand out and please the leadership. Sisters would travel all over the country to observe what other groups were doing to mimic but also to help expand their own ideas. Women leaders who did not step up had to step back and were ultimately

relieved of duty. Women like men were expected to bring their practical knowledge to the community and move the Nation ever forward.

Historically, the Nation of Islam was perhaps the most powerful and successful Black self-determinist community post-World War II. Since the era of Black consciousness, it has been a vital economic, educational, spiritual and sociopolitical force in American life. In almost every echelon of the community Nation women were present, not through agitation or conflict with their male counterparts but as a complement in helping to build a thriving community life. Their presence and agency was visible in the schools, businesses, mosque affairs, leadership positions, and the newspaper. In every facet of the group women's input was actively solicited. Muslim women did not have to carve out a space to exert their power, as gender equality was inherent in its structure and supported by Islamic doctrine. Women members of the Nation had a significant role to play and those responsibilities included a place in the public and private spheres of the community. Women's public positions as captains, lieutenants, secretaries, investigators, business owners, newspaper sellers, teachers and other roles that provided them with purposeful direction and foresight that assisted them in creating a number of ways to help support the overall efforts of the Nation particularly in the area of consciousness raising and re-education. In their private lives many were also mothers, wives, and homebuilders who were dedicated to ensuring a spiritual, nurturing, disciplined and healthy environment.

The women from 1945 to 1975 were extremely diverse and came from a plethora of backgrounds. Some were single, while others were married. Many

completed high school while others had not; some were dope addicts and smokers, while others had lived a “clean” life. Women came in as young as fifteen and some in their forties or fifties. The unemployed, working class, middle class, entertainers, and college educated filled the ranks of the Nation. As Sister Intisar states, although they came from all walks of life they “learned how to get along with each other . . . and how to respect each other despite . . . [their] differences. [They] all ended up at the same place, following the same leader.”² Although they were varied in their background, the vast majority of those who came in after 1965 were college educated, even though some college graduates came in before that time.

Black women, like men, brought their social and psychological baggage with them. Some were in the habit of taking a back seat to men and perhaps were less progressive in the early days of their involvement because of the traditions they were accustomed. Sister Intisar spoke of how sometimes she had to drag the detractors from the group who were perhaps not as willing to take their proper exalted and honored place within the community, a place of mutual respect and empowerment.

What has been presented in this dissertation is my understanding of the Nation of Islam women and their involvement in the largest Black Islamic community in the United States, from 1945 until 1975, assessed from the use of Nation documents by and about women, illuminating interviews, primary and secondary sources. Although the Nation has been described as “violently anti-white, anti-Christian, anti-integration and anti-United States,” in reality, Islam as

articulated by the Nation is the “guarantor against poverty, racism, classism, and sexual degradation of women . . . [It] provides an alternative model of democracy, economy, and politics, thereby formulating a true challenge to [those who would deny their importance or their progressive gender dynamics].”³ C. Eric Lincoln supports the notion, at least implicitly, of the equality between women and men within the group.⁴

To those who may still suggest complicity in oppression or oppression itself, I would counter that we need to acknowledge the very fact that Black women chose to throw off the traditional doctrines of religion and culture at a time when Blacks were degraded and oppressed by means of race, class and gender to demonstrate their agency. These Muslim women voluntarily took on an additional burden in order to demonstrate their heightened activism and their lack of acquiesce to the status quo or the traditional ways of being Black in America. That Nation women were pioneering purveyors of Black consciousness is evident in the fact that they made such a seismic intellectual, cultural, and spiritual shift to embrace self determination even in the face of enormous pressure to conform inside and out of the wider Black community. Their actions bear witness to their agency particularly for women who joined prior to the late 1960s when “different” perspectives started to become far more acceptable.

Future Directions

There have been a number of scholarly works completed on the Nation of Islam, yet that number does not represent the impact and legacy of the group in American and African American history. Many of the primary documents from the

community are in private collections or have been lost or destroyed. However, new Muslim repositories are expanding and making once secured community documents available to the wider public. As a result, there is much work to be done concerning the Nation of Islam. To date, there are no studies that examine the evolution of Nation women from their origins in the 1930s to the reconstituted Nation of Islam under the leadership of Minister Louis Farrakhan. A thorough study providing a detail and accurate Nation history is also missing from the historical record. The Nation of Islam has spread internationally and now boasts of members from almost every continent. A study exploring Nation of Islam communities abroad may prove most insightful particularly in locations that are majority Black. Also intriguing may be the polygamous practices of Black men in the United States particularly after the move of the NOI to so-called orthodox Islam. Although not well known there are Black women who participate in polygamous marriages within the United States, an examination of those relationships and the impact on both women, men and children may prove rewarding particularly as it relates to or perhaps opposes ideas about American family values.

As Islam takes its place as the second largest religion in America, and continues to grow, helping to build tolerance and understanding concerning the religion and lifestyle requires further exploration. This work is only one glimpse at the encounters and lives of Black Muslim women within the United States during the post-World War II era of Black consciousness. The Nation of Islam

scholarship has a great deal of future potential as Nation of Islam repositories holding primary community documents continue to expand.

This study of the Nation of Islam is valuable not solely because it reflects a far more accurate picture of the practice of Islam in the United States but also because it simultaneously reclaims, illuminates, and more precisely clarifies the image and role of Black Muslim women within the Black Islamic community within the United States from 1945 until 1975.

NOTES

¹ John Hope Franklin. "On the evolution of scholarship in Afro-American History. Darlene Clark Hine (ed.) (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State university Press, 1986).13. (reprinted on-line resource).http://bsc.chadwyck.com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/search/displayKeyresourceItemById.do?ItemID=PALM_15.

² Sister Intisar, interview by author, Richmond, CA, April 2008.

³ Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad: Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam*, 3

⁴ Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 83 and Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad: Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam*, 3.

Lexicon

1. **Apex of Black consciousness:** Ranges from 1965 to 1975 and represents the highest point of Black awareness during the post-World War II era of Black Consciousness. Evidenced in the increase of civil rights direct action, increase in Black nationalists institutions and groups e.g. Black Panthers, "US" organization, Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), The Republic of New Africa, Black Arts Movement (BAM). International Black Conscious Movement, BCM. Later clear lines begin to develop between Civil Rights and Black Power groups. Autonomy and violence usurp integration and passivity. The apex is denoted by other events such as SNCC's move away from integrated organization and nonviolence, the assassination of M.L.K. Urban Riots, South African BCM, and the Black Studies movement.¹
2. **Asiatic:** Those individuals or groups that are located in Africa, Asia, Europe or the Americas that are descendants of Asians/Africans. According to Nation of Islam folklore Asians and Africans are the same people that were told they were different people by Europeans.
3. **Black Nationalism:** Describes a body of social thought, attitudes, and actions ranging from the simplest expressions of ethnocentrism and racial solidarity to the comprehensive and sophisticated ideologies of Pan-Negroism or Pan-Africanism. There are variety of nationalisms, racial, cultural, economic etc.²
4. **Community:** A community constitutes 1) a grouping of people; 2) within a geographic locale (does not need to be local); 3) with a division of labor into specialized and interdependent functions; 4) with a common culture and a social system which organizes their activities; 5) whose members are conscious of their unity and of belonging to the community; and 6) who can act collectively in an organized manner.³
5. **Black Consciousness** infuses the black community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their values systems, their culture, their religion and their outlook on life.⁴
6. **Era of Black consciousness:** The period, from 1945 to 1975, of heightened and greater cohesiveness and solidarity among people of African descent made possible by several previous and concurrent historical events i.e., the Great Depression, the Nation of Islam, World War II, Double V Campaign and the torrent of African-Asian liberated countries, and continued marginalization of Black people as subversives to American democratic ideas such as liberty and freedom.

7. **Gender Capital:** Knowledge, skills and experiences that confer power and privileges along gender lines. It is an ideology that gives advantages and/or elevates to a higher status an individual or group based on one's sex. Having gender capital allows an individual or gender group to succeed or advance based on qualities of what constitutes masculinity and femininity.⁵
8. **Independent Black Schools:** IBS's are educational institutions that have successfully established economic, curricular, political and religious autonomy.
9. **Militant:** A Black Militant is a Black person who is consciously and actively opposed to racist ideas, principles and behavior which obstruct the full development of the Black potential; and who does not necessarily limit his opposition to statements or actions which have wide social approval at the time. A Black Militant Must be Black, Must be consciously opposed to racism, Must be actively opposed to racism, Must use words or methods not commonly approved at the time.⁶
10. **Nation of Islam:** The Nation of Islam has been written about under a variety of names. Allah's Temple of Islam, The Lost-Found Nation of Islam in the Wilderness of North America, NOI, Original Nation of Islam or the Nation. After 1975 first of several name changes was to World Community of Al-Islam in the West.
11. **Non-white:** Any individual who is not of European-descent.
12. **Political:** Of or relating to rules about social relationships involving authority or power or concerned with acts involving political system.⁷
13. **Religious Nationalism:** National and/or international unity based on religious doctrine. It creates a cultural and religious bond between citizens of a community centered in religious doctrine and ritual. More than a mark of group identity it is a mark of values and worldviews encompassed in religious principals⁸
14. **Self-determinist:** Individuals or groups rigorously pursue efforts and practices to formally establish economic, educational and politically autonomous Black institutions.
15. **Sister/Brother:** Refers to males and females in the Nation of Islam community. It is used to help build a feeling of mutual respect and camaraderie.

In Their Own Words: Personal Reflections/Testimonies of Nation Women

Certainly, scholars will agree that the Nation of Islam was open to every Black man, woman and child no matter the background or prior condition---pimp, prostitute, unemployed, dope addict, spiritually lost. It was a place one could recreate herself and do important work for the benefit of the Black nation. As this dissertation asserts, women and men significantly profited from and contributed to the Nation of Islam economically, intellectually, socially, spiritually and politically. Thus, the following women's testimonies are taken directly from *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper, Muhammad's University of Islam Yearbooks and Vanguard Brochure provide additional women's narratives concerning their experiences in the NOI and the benefits they believed they garnered from the experience.

Vanguards

Sister Markeeta X: *My name is Sister Markeeta X Williams, I was born April 1954, I am 21 years old, married and have one daughter. I went through twelve years of Caucasian education system. After which I attended a school of the arts. I didn't obtain any real knowledge until December 12, 1973, when I became a registered believer in the Nation of Islam. Only then did my life take on any true meaning. I was a member of the North team for two months, until I found out about the Vanguard Class. I joined the Vanguard and got the training I needed to become a striving Muslim Sister. In May of 1975, I became a Lt. which I regarded as a high honor to be a hard working top sister and help the Supreme Sister get the job done.⁹*

Sister Delores 11X: *I was born March 8, 1951 at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital, in Philadelphia, Pa. I was the first child of Mr. and Mrs. Dorothy Staples. I was raised by my Grandfather and Grandmother in the Nation of Islam. I attended Temple No. 24, in Richmond, Virginia until the age of 13. At the age of 13, I attended Robert Vaux Jr. High School from the year 1967-1969. I was an honor student during all of my high school years until graduation, June 1969. I was blessed to marry Brother Marvin 2X on September 22, 1969. Out of this*

*marriage was born a baby girl, Salema 2X on December 25, 1970. I have had the honor to work with the Vanguard Class for the last four years. Out of this class I have learned how to work and what it is to work, also as a result of my work in the Vanguard Class I advanced to the post of Vanguard Lt. Aide and have now been blessed to work as a Lt.*¹⁰

Educators

We need teachers but not just any teacher. We need teachers who understand themselves as black men and women, working to free themselves from the forces of the Devil, and who can pass on this knowledge to our children and our Nation. Such teachers will be morally, spiritually, and mentally free to pass on to our children and the nation the knowledge and self help we so desperately need.¹¹

Sister Lottie Muhammad, Dean of Girls: *Thinking over the school situations in the world today, observing the whirlpool of turmoil that is happening at this very moment such as teachers striking, students protesting and rioting, burning, and bombing, shooting and killing, a great circulation of drugs, freedom of Sex, [and] illegitimacy, which has led to an epidemic of general disease among our youth. All these things are attributed to our youth of today who are to be our world leaders of tomorrow. One can't help but wonder, what type of world this will produce. In the midst of this chaos, we, the Muslims, can whole-heartedly give praise to All might God Allah for giving us our Leader and Teacher, the Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad, Who is leading and guiding us into the path of righteousness and enabling us to set up our own school to teach and train our children first of all in Islam. Being a good Muslim makes them intelligent, obedient, and have love and understanding of self. They are clothed in cleanliness. Their heads are wrapped in wisdom and knowledge of their own black history, self and kind. Their bodies are wrapped in righteousness, discipline, and respect for themselves and others.*¹²

Sister Rosalind X, Arabic Teacher: *I am very happy to have this opportunity to tell you what a long way the University of Islam has come. I have been in the Nation of Islam for 26 years. When I first attended the University of Islam, in the early forties, we met at a sister's house. As the years went by, Allah blessed us with a larger place on 43rd Street. We had our classes in the Mosque and Minister James Shabazz was the principal and my teacher. Here is where I began to learn the Arabic Language. Due to the fact that we didn't have enough qualified teachers, there were some subjects that we didn't have. Our religion, Islam, was always taught in our school. The school number still wasn't half as large as it is now. Our classes were divided into A, B, and C classes. We were still earning Arabic Language. I graduated from the University in January 1956. Since then, we began to get more and more students. Now our school is overcrowded . . . Sister Agnita . . . made it possible through our Leader and*

*Teacher for me to return to our school and teach the Arabic (our own) Language.*¹³

Sister Captain Portia Pasha, B.S. Diploma d'Etude, University of Paris-Faculte de la Sorbonne and District of Columbia Teachers College: *Although English is not our original language, teaches our Divine Leader and Teacher, it is spoken by the majority of the people. Therefore the student attending the University of Islam must learn and master this major language of the world. My approach in teaching English to the secondary level is to present and teach this subject as a foreign language . . . The students of English are taught the following subject areas: grammar, usage, sentence structure, composition, speaking and listening , mechanics and library and reference tools. We strive in the English Department to teach English so that it has a practical application to speaking and writing, and we require adequate mastery of the skills of oral and written expressions. Thus our desire is that students at Muhammad University of Islam be able to speak and write as well as the most learned person from any nation.*¹⁴

Sister Iris X, Business Education Teacher B.S.C. North Carolina College Degree in Business Education. *No business enterprise can be successful without efficient and qualified workers. Being aware of this, the Business Department at Muhammad University is striving hard to qualify those who are interested in secretarial work. These students are being taught typing, secretarial practice skills and shorthand. In our secretarial practice class, the students learn proper office etiquette , vocabulary, business mathematics, and letter writing . . . Messenger Muhammad teaches us to 'get an education to benefit self,' with this in mind, the students are working hard in order to take their rightful places in the growing businesses of the Nation of Islam.*¹⁵

Sister Marva X, B.A. Fisk University Degree in Sociology: *Social Studies is the study of the earth, its people and their relationship to each. This entails a variety of sub-topics which include Geology, Astronomy, Meteorology, Geographical skills . . . The Muslim student is urged to be alert and aware of current events in world. All current events bear witness to Messenger Muhammad's teachings and we help the student to find and see this relationship.*¹⁶

Sister Alva Adele X, B.A. of Education, Chicago Teachers College: *We study mathematics (traditional and modern), English, Arabic, Geography and Penmanship. Only by attending Muhammad University of Islam can Black Children truly learn. For until they learn WHO they are and WHY they are their minds remain shackled by the misconception taught them by the slavemaster's children.*¹⁷

Students

Sister Ruqaiyah Muhammad, President of the Student Council: *I plan to enroll in Jr. College for two years, then transfer to a teachers' college, where I hope to major in general education, qualifying me to teach grades 3-8. When I complete my education, I will come back to the University of Islam, and become a Muslim teacher.*

Dolores X Evans, Reporter for school newspaper: *After graduation, I plan to enter a Jr. College and major in mathematics and English.*

Sister Gloria Dean Jordan: *My greatest ambition in life is to be well-qualified in the field of business. I have chosen business. I have chosen business as my ambition, to help my nation. Since most of the world is run by machines and computers, I plan to attend a college and learn General Clerical and secretarial work and computer programming.*¹⁸

Sandra 3X Parker: *There are many, many things that I have learned here, at the University of Islam that I couldn't learn at the public schools. I once attended a public school, and I never learned the knowledge of self, always about someone else (white race). When we did have history class, it was always the White history when it should have been Black History. So therefore I think that I am blessed to attend Muhammad University of Islam so I can learn about me and Black Brothers and Sisters.*¹⁹

Salma Muhammad: *My graduation, at this point, is one of the most important events in my life. Graduation from the University of Islam means a great deal. It means graduating from a School that has no teacher strike, no student rebellion, no bad talk or disrespect to anyone. It means love for one another.. It means respect and discipline, well-mannered civilized human beings . . . All this spells out to unity. And when I graduate from the University of Islam and go out into the world, I'm not going to forget that I was a student here and that I am a Muslim. I'm going to go on and learn as much as I can and come back to help the Honorable Elijah Muhammad in anyway and every way I can.*²⁰

Wasima X Pickett: *Graduation means achievement of a preliminary education so that I may enter a more advanced and technical world of education and knowledge. Graduation means greater opportunities to excel and acquire my desired goals. I have been greatly inspired to strive daily to excel both physically and mentally.*²¹

Violet X Steward: *Graduation means a chance to further my education. I like the fulfillment you receive from learning and receiving knowledge. To graduate makes me feel that I have achieved and learned much worthwhile knowledge that I will use both in the present and in the future.*²²

Mary Ann X Lee: *The Muhammad University of Islam has given me the kind of education that has prepared me to go into any walk of life and be confident that I can stand proudly as an example of one taught by the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. I am very happy to be a graduate, and I pray to Allah too that I shall further qualify myself so that I can be of some service to the Nation of Islam.*²³

Samira Shabazz: *I, Samira being of partially sound mind, hereby write my last will and testament to be passed on to an eleventh grader in the event of my passing to the twelfth grade.*

I hereby leave you one slightly used biology book complete with sympathetic ear to the most touching 'why I didn't do my homework' stories. Among my prize possessions, I leave you 19 different ways to dodge Sis. Agnita while chewing gum. (They don't work) Next, I will tell you how to psychologically stay warm while standing outside in below zero weather. Think of the warm greetings you will receive from the teachers when you get inside. Then, after recovering from a rare case of psychological frost-bite, think of going home. In conclusion I leave you a group of the most determined teachers, who will teach you to the best of their ability (no matter whom it kills).

*P.S. I would like my remains (grades) to be cremated.*²⁴

Other Members

Sister Edwina X: *History teaches us that no nation can rise any higher than its women. The Nation of Islam under the divine guidance of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, has elevated millions of black women throughout the wilderness of North America. Islam teaches the Black woman that she is the mother of civilization, the queen of the earth. Elijah Muhammad is the only Black leader in America who has a special training class for the so-called Negro woman, designed to place her on top of civilization where she rightfully belongs. The Muslim Girls Training and General Civilization Class uplifts the black woman to a level of charm and grace equal to any civilized woman in the world. In MGT & GCC, she finds love, peace, unity and sisterhood. Islam elevates the Muslim woman by giving her wisdom, knowledge, culture and refinement. She no longer desires to take part in sport and play, filth and evil of the white man's society. This achievement is a tribute to the divine leadership of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. As a Muslim follower of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, I can surely say that Islam is the most wonderful thing that has ever come to the so-called American Negro.*²⁵

Sandra J. X: *Before I heard of Islam I was just a simple Southern girl whose only desire was to dance, have fun and one day meet some male who would provide for me. I only wanted some things. Since hearing the truth (Islam), my entire outlook on life has changed. No longer do I consider myself just a simple, Southern girl for I have found that I am an original Asiatic Black woman who is*

queen of the entire planet earth and the mother of all civilization—a Muslim. No longer do I desire to dance the asinine dances of the evil society created by white devil race of mankind. I have taken off the short dresses made fashionable by the vulgar, shameless white woman of North America. Islam is the most wonderful thing to come to the so-called Negroes of America. Islam is a way of life easy comprehension, the child or the man may equally delight in its simplicity. It is not burdened with dogma contrary to logic or reason. There are no far-fetched theories of the transmigration of the physical dead. There is no need for the heart and the head to tread different paths. A Muslim follower of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad can avow his or her faith with out insulting his or her intelligence. In Islam I have found a religion of peace and love. The dominant feature of Islam as its very nature implies is the making of peace.²⁶

Sister Agnita: *I take this opportunity to bear witness to the improvements and fulfillments in my life since I turned to Islam and give thanks Him for guiding me aright following His Messenger. I thank Him for the wisdom passed on to me in the form of truths from His Messenger. These truths made me steadfast in my beliefs and have lifted me to new heights . . . We call him the interpreter, for he translates what is written in The Book, words which, heretofore, were foreign. He makes them meaningful and adaptable to our daily lives. He teaches us the truth of ourselves. He answers who? . . . what? . . . why? . . . where? . . . and when? - -- questions never before raised because we were busy patterning ourselves after grafted, devil race . . . You laugh at us, the Muslims. We have learned to tolerate your amusement. Our leader and teacher has endured obstacles, ridicule and taunts from you for 35 odd years. He is an ideal example. He patiently but anxiously awaits you, the so-called Negro, a mentally dead nation and extremely difficult to arouse. I, who am blessed to often sit in his presence, know he is no ordinary man. His wisdom is supreme. His learning surpasses that found in any book. His knowledge is far reaching. None can compare.²⁷*

NOTES

¹ Robert H. Brisbane, *Black Activism, Racial Revolution in the United States, 1954-1970* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1974), 8.

² John H. Bracey, Jr., August Meier, Elliott Rudwick, eds. (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1970), xxvi.

³ Christian T. Johassen, "Community Typology," in Marvin B. Sussman, ed., *Community Structure and Analysis* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1959), 20.

⁴ Steven Biko, Readings, "The definition of Black Consciousness" in *The African Philosophy Reader*, eds. Pieter Hendrik Coetzee and A.P. J. Roux (New York: Routledge, 1998), 360.

⁵ Susan A. Dumais, "Cultural Capital, Gender, and School Success: the role of habitus" *Sociology of Education*, 75, no.1 (January 2002):44-68. <http://www.proquest.com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/>.

⁶ "Black Militants Then and Now," C. Eric Lincoln Collection, 134:2. Robert W. Woodruff Library Atlanta University Center.

⁷ *Merriam Webster Dictionary*.

⁸ Peter van der Veer. *Religious Nationalism, Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

¹ Narratives of the Vanguard. *The Vanguard of Muhammad's Temple of Islam No. 12. Miss Vanguard 1975.*

¹⁰ Ibid.

² Sister Christine Johnson "Children Now" *Muhammad Speaks*. December 1961.

³ *Muhammad University of Islam, Yearbook, 1971. Sister Lottie Muhammad, Dean of Girls*

⁴ Sister Rosalind X, Former Student and Present Arabic Teacher, "Our Arabic Teacher." *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook, 1968,*

⁵ Ibid, Sister Captain Portia Pasha. "English As A Second Language" *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook, 1968.*

⁶ Sister Iris X "Business Education." *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook, 1968.*

⁷ Sister Marva X "Grade Seven." *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook, 1968.*

⁸ Sister Alva Adele X. "Grade Four." *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook, 1968.*

⁹ Graduating Seniors of Class of 1968, *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook, 1968.*

¹⁰ Sister 3X Parker "Students Speak," *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook, 1971.*

¹¹ Salma Muhammad, "Students Speak." *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook, 1971.*

¹² Wasima X Pickett, "An Islamic Education Is the Key to Our Success" *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook, 197.*

¹³ Violet X Steward. "An Islamic Education Is the Key to Success," *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook, 1971.*

¹⁴ Mary Ann X Lee, *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook, 1971.*

¹⁵ Sister Samira Shabazz "It's All in the Mind," *Muhammad University of Islam Yearbook, 1968*

²⁵ Sister Charles Ann X, "Says Islam Lifts Up the Black Woman, Giving Her Wisdom, Knowledge, Strength," *Muhammad Speaks*, June 23, 1967.

²⁶ Sandra J. X, "Black Woman Finds Peace, Freedom in Folds of Islam," *Muhammad Speaks*, June 2, 1967.

²⁷ Sister Agnita, "She Finds 'None Can Compare' With the Messenger, Whose Wisdom is Supreme," *Muhammad Speaks*, May 26, 1967.

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