THE COLUMBIA SOURCEBOOK OF MUSLIMS IN THE UNITED STATES

EDWARD E. CURTIS IV
Editor

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS
NEW YORK
Formerly I, Omar, loved to read the book of the Koran the famous. General Jim Owen and his wife used to read the gospel, and they read it to me very much, the gospel of God, our Lord, our Creator, our King, He that orders all our circumstances, health and wealth, willingly, not constrainedly, according to his power. Open thou my heart to the gospel, to the way of uprightness. Thanks to the Lord of all worlds, thanks in abundance. He is plenteous in mercy and abundant in goodness.

For the law was given by Moses but grace and truth were by the Jesus the Messiah.

When I was a Mohammedan I prayed thus: “Thanks be to God, Lord of all worlds, the merciful the gracious, Lord of the day of Judgment, thee we serve, on thee we call for help. Direct us in the right way, the way of those on whom thou hast had mercy, with whom thou hast not been angry and who walk not in error [Qur‘ān 1:1–7]. Amen.” But now I pray “Our Father” [here Omar writes out the Protestant version of the Lord’s prayer] in the words of our Lord Jesus the Messiah.

I reside in this our country by reason of great necessity. Wicked men took me by violence and sold me to the Christians. We sailed a month and a half on the great sea to the place called Charleston in the Christian land. I fell into the hands of a small, weak and wicked man, who feared not God at all nor did he read (the gospel) at all nor pray. I was afraid to remain with a man so depraved and who committed so many crimes and I ran away. After a month our Lord God brought me forward to the hand of a good man, who fears God, and loves to do good, and whose name is Jim Owen and whose brother is called Col. John Owen. These are two excellent men. I am residing in Bladen County.

I continue in the hand of Jim Owen who never beats me, nor scolds me. I neither go hungry nor naked, and I have no hard work to do. I am not able to do hard work for I am a small man and feeble. During the last twenty years I have known no want in the hand of Jim Owen.

2. Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb, 
*Islam in America* (1893)

Mohammed Webb (1846–1916) was born in Hudson, New York, and raised a Presbyterian Christian. A journalist by trade, he worked as a writer and editor for the Missouri Republican and St. Joseph Gazette before being appointed by
President Grover Cleveland as United States Consul to the Philippines in 1887. He was already a religious seeker when he arrived in Manila, where he studied the teachings of Islam under the guidance of Budruddin Abdulla Kur, a Muslim from Bombay, India. After converting to Islam, Webb resigned his post and set out, with the financial support of Hajj Abdulla Arab, a merchant from Medina, Arabia, to be a Muslim missionary in America. Webb’s writings about Islam challenged the stereotypical views of Muslims that were so much a part of American popular culture at the time. His defense of Islam as a rational, scientific, and progressive religion reflected the influence of his Asian mentors, who had fashioned a modern interpretation of Islam meant to combat the claims of Christian missionaries in British India and other colonized lands. Webb’s Islam in America thus rejected images of Islam as the religion of the sword, defended the status of women in Islam, and sought to clarify the significance of polygamy to the average Muslim; in fact, Webb presents Islamic religion as perfectly compatible not only with the ethical principles that he views as common to all Abrahamic religions but also with Victorian norms of propriety and cleanliness, as well. Webb’s introduction to “orthodox Islam,” as he called it, features an explanation of the five pillars of practice, including the profession of faith, prayer, alms, fasting, and pilgrimage, and a summary of Muslim beliefs in God, angels, revelation, the prophets, the Day of Judgment, and God’s omniscience. But Webb also indicates that these “exoteric” aspects of Islam are only part of the religion, suggesting that for him, the “esoteric” or philosophic aspects of Islam are equally important.

I have been frequently asked why I, an American, born in a country which is nominally Christian, and reared, “under the drippings” of an orthodox Presbyterian pulpit, came to adopt the faith of Islam as my guide in life. A reply to this question may be of interest now to that large body of independent thinkers, who are manifesting a desire to know what the Islamic system really is. I am not vain enough to believe that I am the only American in this vast and progressive country capable of comprehending the system taught by the inspired Prophet of Arabia, and of appreciating its beauty and perfection. Nor do I believe that I am so deficient mentally as to accept, as truth, a religion which no one else in this country would be foolish enough to accept. But whether those who do accept it are wise or foolish in the estimation of their fellow men, I feel quite confident that at least a few may be benefited by my experience.

I was not born, as some boys seem to be, with a fervently religious strain
in my character. I was emotional in later years, but not mawkishly sentimental, and always demanded a reason for everything. I will not even go so far as to assert that I was a good boy, such as fond and prejudiced mothers sometimes point out as shining examples for their own sons. I attended the Presbyterian Sunday school of my native town—when I couldn’t avoid it—and listened with weariness and impatience to the long, abstruse discourses of the minister, while I longed to get out into the glad sunshine, and hear the more satisfying sermons preached by God Himself, through the murmuring brooks, the gorgeous flowers and the joyous birds. I listened incredulously to the story of the immaculate conception; and the dramatic tale of the vicarious atonement failed to arouse in me a thrill of tearful emotion, because I doubted the truth of both dogmas. Of course the narrow-minded church Christian will say at once, that the scriptural bogey-man, Satan, had me in his clutches as soon as I was born.

When I reached the age of twenty, and became, practically, my own master, I was so weary of the restraint and dullness of the church that I wandered away from it, and never returned to it. As a boy I found nothing in the system taught me in church and Sunday-school calculated to win me to it, nor did I find it any more attractive in later years, when I came to investigate it carefully and thoroughly. I found its moral ethics most commendable, but no different from those of every other system, while its superstitions, its grave errors, and its inefficiency as a means of securing salvation, or of elevating and purifying the human character, caused me to wonder why any thoughtful, honest and intelligent person could accept it seriously. Fortunately I was of an enquiring turn of mind—I wanted a reasonable foundation for everything—and I found that neither laymen nor clergy could give me any rational explanation of their faith; that when I asked them about God and the trinity, and life and death, they told me either that such things were mysteries, or were beyond the comprehension of ordinary mortals.

After trying in vain to find something in the Christian system to satisfy the longings of my soul and meet the demands of reason, I drifted into materialism; and, for several years, had no religion at all except the golden rule, which I followed about as closely as the average Christian follows it.

About eleven years ago I became interested in the study of the Oriental religions, beginning with Buddhism, as students of the Eastern systems usually do, and finding much to interest me in the Theosophical literature, which was not easy to be obtained in this country at that time. So
intensely absorbed did I become in my studies and experiments, that I de-
oted four and five hours a day to them, often taking for that purpose
time that I really needed for sleep. My mind was in a peculiarly receptive,
yet exacting and analytical condition, absolutely free from the prejudices
of all creeds, and ready to absorb the truth, no matter where it might be
found. I was intensely in earnest in my efforts to solve the mysteries of life
and death, and to know what relation the religious systems of the world
bore to these mysteries. I reasoned that if there was no life beyond the
grave, no religion was necessary to mankind; while if, as was claimed by
many, there was a post-mortem life of far greater duration than the earthly
existence, the nature and conditions of which were governed by our life
on this globe, then it was of the greatest importance to know what course
of life here would produce the most satisfying results in the next world.

Firmly materialistic, I looked at first to the advanced school of materi-
alistic science, and found that it was just as completely immersed in the
darkness of ignorance concerning spiritual things, as I was. It could tell
me the name of every bone, muscle, nerve and organ of the human body,
as well as its position, and (with one exception) its purpose or function;
but it could not tell me the real difference between a living man and a
dead one. It could tell me the name of every tree, plant and flower, and
designate the species to which each belonged, as well as its apparent prop-
erties or attributes; but it could not tell me how and why the tree grew and
flower bloomed. It was absolutely certain that man was born of woman,
lived a brief period, and died; but whence he came, and whether he went
were riddles which it confessed itself utterly unable to solve.

"Those matters belong to the church," said a scientist to me.
"But the church knows nothing of them," I replied.
"Nor do I, nor does science," was the helpless, hopeless way in which he
dismissed the question from the conversation.

I saw Mill and Locke, and Kant and Hegel, and Fichte and Huxley, and
many other more or less learned writers, discoursing, with a great show of
wisdom, concerning protoplasm, and protogen, and monads, and yet not
one of them could tell me what the soul was, or what becomes of it after
death.

"But no one can tell you that," I fancy I hear someone say.
That is one of the greatest errors that poor, blind humanity ever made.
There are people who have solved this mystery, but they are not the blind,
credulous, materialistic followers of materialistic creeds.
I have spoken thus much of myself in order to show the reader that my adoption of Islam was not the result of misguided sentiment, blind credulity or sudden emotional impulse, but that it followed an earnest, honest, persistent, unprejudiced study and investigation, and an intense desire to know the truth.

After I had fully satisfied myself of the immortality of the soul, and that the conditions of the life beyond the grave were regulated by the thoughts, deeds and acts of the earth life; that man was, in a sense, his own savior and redeemer, and that the intercession of anyone between him and his God could be of no benefit to him, I began to compare the various religions, in order to ascertain which was the best and most efficacious as a means of securing happiness in the next life. To do this it was necessary to apply to each system, not only the tests of reason, but certain truths which I had learned during my long course of study and experiment outside the lines of orthodoxy, and in fields which priest and preacher usually avoid. . . .

There is no religious system known to humanity that is and has been, for centuries, so grossly misrepresented and thoroughly misunderstood by so-called Christians as that taught by the Prophet of Islam. The prejudice against it is so strong among the English-speaking people of the globe, that even the suggestion that it may possibly be the true faith and at least, worthy of a careful, unprejudiced investigation, is usually received with a contemptuous smile, as if such a thing was too palpably absurd to be considered seriously. It is this stubborn, unreasoning prejudice that prevents Europeans and Americans, who visit the East, from acquiring any accurate knowledge of Mohammedan social and religious life, or of the true doctrines of Islam. The air of superiority and self-sufficiency which they usually carry with them, repels the better and more enlightened classes of Mussulmans, and what is acquired from the lower classes cannot be taken as in any sense reliable. And yet it is this class of information that furnishes the inspiration for the magazine articles and books upon Mohammedan social life and beliefs which circulate in Europe and America.

Before covering in detail the Islamic system, let me say that my study and observation among the Mussulmans of the East have led me to confidently believe that it is the most perfect system of soul-development ever given to man, and the only one applicable to all classes of humanity. It is founded upon that eternal truth, which has been handed down to man
from age to age by the chosen prophets of God, from Moses to Mohammed. It is the only system known to man that is strictly in harmony with reason and science. It is free from degrading superstitions, and appeals directly to human rationality and intelligence. It makes every man individually responsible for every act he commits and every thought he thinks, and does not encourage him to sin by teaching him a vicarious atonement. It is elevating and refining in its tendencies, and develops the higher, nobler elements of humanity when it is faithfully, wisely and intelligently followed.

I am aware that this declaration will cause some of those Christians who are broad-minded enough to read this book, to smile and ask, if, in my extensive intercourse with Mohammedans of all classes in the East, I discovered much striking evidence of the exalting, ennobling influences of Islam. Of course the wise Christian will refrain from asking this question, but it is probably the first one that the mentally blind churchman will ask after he has duly questioned me concerning polygamy, that great bugbear, which Christians almost universally consider the first and most important article of faith with the Mussulman.

If we are to judge a religious system by the moral and social character of many of its professed followers, Christianity will be so thoroughly condemned that it will speedily pass out of existence. Take a professed Mohammedan and compare him with a professed Christian of the same intellectual caliber, the same education and the same opportunities for obtaining secular knowledge, and I am confident that the Mohammedan will show a cleaner moral record and higher spiritual perceptions than the Christian. Some of the most wretchedly degraded and fanatically superstitious people I have ever met in my life, called themselves Christians. Of course they were not Christians, nor did they have even the remotest conception of the true teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, but they believed, or claimed to believe, in the Christian dogmas. Now every Mohammedan knows that it requires something more to make a true Mohammedan than the parrot-like repetition of certain words of sentences. Because a man says he is a Mohammedan, it does not follow that he comprehends, or lives up to the spirit of, the teachings of the Prophet. If he does not do so he cannot properly be taken as an example of the effects and tendencies of Islam. No religious system can fairly be judged by the acts and expressions of all of its professed followers; its plainly and fully established fundamental teachings and tenets only should guide us in forming an opinion of it.
And here let me assure the reader that there is nothing in the Islamic system that tends to immorality, impurity of thought, social degradation, superstition or fanaticism. On the contrary it leads on to all that is purest and noblest in the human character, and when we see a professed Mohammedan who is unclean in his person and habits, who is untruthful, cruel, intolerant, irreverent or fanatical, we may at once conclude that he is not a true follower of Islam, and, that he fails utterly to grasp the spirit of the religion he professes.

Let us consider briefly some of the salient principles—the most prominent features of this religion, viz: the unity of God, cleanliness, prayer, fasting, fraternity, pilgrimage and almsgiving. These may be said to form the foundation of the system, and I believe that an understanding of them is all that is necessary to commend it to any intelligent person.

Islam means, literally, resignation to the will of God, and the Islamic prayer is an aspiration to the higher spirit which is with and within every man. The Bible teaches that the Kingdom of Heaven is within us; the Koran teaches that God is nearer to every man than his jugular vein. The word Islam, by which every Mussulman designates his religion, carries with it the idea of an effort to become purer, better and more worthy to worship and submit to the will of the one true God. . . .

Anyone who will analyze the teachings of Mohammed will find that, in their ethical aspect, they are exactly in harmony with the ethical teachings of Moses, Abraham, Jesus and every other truly inspired prophet known to history. The system he promulgated differs quite materially from that previously given to the world, because his mission was to present a thorough and complete code, the general purpose of which was to correct the abuses and destroy the errors that had grown about the doctrines taught by his prophetic predecessors. His manifest purpose was to win mankind from idolatry, and to present a series of rules or laws which, if followed faithfully and intelligently, would draw men closer to God and make them purer and cleaner, mentally as well as physically, and better in every respect. He accomplished this mission fully, and was not called hence until he had seen the Islamic system firmly established in the hearts and minds of his followers.

Of course, at this time, we can consider the Islamic system only in its popular or exoteric aspect. As before stated, it has a deeper, more philosophic aspect than is apparent at a first glance. But its chief beauty, viewed superficially, is its perfect adaptability to the spiritual needs of all classes
of humanity, from the humblest laborer to the most advanced thinker and man of letters. There is nothing in it that does violence to reason or common sense, or that is in any degree contrary to the natural instincts of justice and mercy. It requires no belief in the supernatural, nor the adoption of any absurd superstitions nor impossible theories. Purity of thought, word and deed, perfect mental and physical cleanliness, and steady, unswerving aspiration to God, coupled with pure, unselfish fraternal love, are the principal ends sought, and the means are as perfect as it is possible for man to conceive.

The Prophet forcibly declared that prayer was the corner stone of religion, and he laid greater stress upon this than upon any other feature of his system. In order to show the solemnity and importance of prayer more plainly, as well as to secure the carrying out of another principle, the “Woozoo [wudhu],” or ablution, was ordered. It was his evident intention to impress upon his followers the idea of cleanliness in such ways as were the most effective and permanent, and in the rule of ablution, as well as in other rules, we readily see that he understood and appreciated the force of habit. No Mussulman, who prays the required number of times daily, ever thinks of praying without thinking also of his “Woozoo,” and thus he is reminded five times a day, at least, that he should have clean hands, face and feet, and in responding to the calls of nature, he is cleanly to the last degree; far more so than the average man of any other faith. Thus he acquires habits of personal cleanliness, which he cannot break away from without breaking away from his religion. All the evidence at hand, bearing upon the subject, tends to show that the Prophet not only intended that the hands, feet, face and other parts of the body, and the clothing should be clean when the face was turned toward the Kaaba, and the heart toward God.

No intelligent physician will deny that personal cleanliness, regular habits, and simple diet are conducive to the health of the body. The spiritual philosopher insists that late hours, irregular habits, dissipations of various kinds, and devotion to physical comfort are deleterious to the physical, as well as the moral health.

In the Islamic system, the times for prayer are irrevocably fixed. The first prayer must be said just as the first rays of the sun are gilding the Eastern horizon. After sunrise it must not be said until the time for the noon prayer. Thus the devout Mussulman must arise before daylight. The time for the second prayer is between 12 and 2 o’clock; the third between 4 and
5 o’clock; the fourth just as the sunlight has died away in the West; and, the fifth just before retiring at night. It is considered very meritorious to arise at midnight and pray, but it is not obligatory, before each of these five prayers, the worshipper washes his hands, arms, face, mouth, nostrils, ears and feet in running water.

It will be seen at once that the tendency of this perfect system of prayer is to cultivate habits of healthful regularity and cleanliness; to say nothing of its moral effects.

Man is a creature of habit; and, as a rule, when he once drops into a groove he rarely gets out of it without an unusual effort, unless he does so in order to follow something a little nearer to the earth. If he acquires the habit of praying five times a day, it will cling to him until he dies, and his prayer will increase in earnestness and soulfulness, as his knowledge of the fundamental principles of his religion increases.

One of the wisest provisions of the Islamic system is the rule relative to congregational prayer. The Mussulman is taught that he should always pray in company with others when it is possible for him to do so. Now there are several very good and sufficient reasons for this rule which can only be discussed under the head of Islamic Philosophy; we can only look, now, at its outward aspect. In the first place it is calculated to break down caste distinctions, and place the servant and his master upon a common level before God, in whose presence all men are equal; the beggar, the merchant, the shopkeeper, mechanic, millionaire, and the professional man, all stand elbow to elbow as brothers in the mosque at the time of prayer. And when a number of Mussulmans come together anywhere at the stated hours, they are bound to cast aside social distinctions and pray together. It is also the duty of the Mussulman to pray wherever he may happen to be when the hour of prayer arrives; or if the place is unsuitable, to seek a better one.

It is generally admitted that a man may call himself a Mussulman if he simply declares his belief in the Unity of God and the inspiration of the Prophet. But he certainly cannot be called a true follower of Islam unless he prays from the very depths of his heart, and make the purpose of his prayer to bring his soul nearer to God.

The essence of the true faith of Islam is resignation to the will of God, and its corner stone is prayer. It teaches universal fraternity, universal love, and universal benevolence, and requires purity of mind, purity of action, purity of speech and perfect physical cleanliness. It is the simplest
and most elevating form of religion known to man. It has no paid priesthood, nor elaborate ceremonial, admits no vicarious atonement, nor relieves its followers of any of the responsibility for their sins. It recognizes but one God, the Father of all things, the divine spirit that dwells in all the manifestations of nature, the one omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent ruler of the universe, to whom its followers devoutly pray, and before whom all stand upon a platform of perfect equality and fraternity. The devout Mussulman, one who has arrived at an intelligent comprehension of the true teachings of Our Holy Prophet, lives in his religion and makes it the paramount principle of his existence. It is with him in all his goings and comings during the day, and he is never so occupied with his business or worldly affairs that he cannot turn his back upon them, when the stated hour of prayer arrives, and present his soul to God. His loves, his sorrows, his hopes, his fears, are all immersed in it; it is his last thought when he lies down to sleep at night and the first to enter his mind at dawn when the voice of the Muezzin [the prayer caller] rings out loudly and clearly from the minaret of the mosque, waking the soft echoes of the morn with its thrilling solemn, majestic monotones: “Come to Prayer! Come to Prayer! Prayer is better than sleep! Prayer is better than sleep!”

3. Edward Wilmot Blyden, “Islam in the Western Soudan” (1902)

Edward W. Blyden (1832–1912) was born in the Dutch West Indies, traveled to the United States in 1850, and then immigrated to Liberia, where he became a Presbyterian missionary, a classics professor, president of Liberia College, ambassador to Great Britain, secretary of state, minister of the interior, and one of the most noted black authors in the English-speaking world. Blyden, who explored firsthand the indigenous Muslim cultures of West Africa, or what was called the Western Sudan, became a harsh critic of white Christian missionary activities. White missionaries did not save black souls as much as they helped to enslave black bodies and minds, he said. For Blyden, who was well versed in the scientific racism of the nineteenth century, it seemed that whites were, by their very nature, prone to imperialism. Unlike white missionary Christianity, he argued, Islam promoted human equality and encouraged the development of indigenous culture. It helped to build black nations, educate black minds, mold the black character, foster industry and philanthropy, and
ignorance and darkness, into the halls of science, the chambers of culture, until he stands in the presence of the emblem of light and intelligence in possession of the key that will open to the diligent inquirer every truth in nature’s wide domain.

For esoteric reasons we hang the horns pointing downward, representing the setting moon of the old faith at the moment of the rising sun of the new faith in the brotherhood of all mankind—the essential unity of humanity as of one blood, the children of one fatherhood.

5. WPA Interviews with Mary Juma and Mike Abdallah (1939)

*During the era of the Great Depression, the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a child of President Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, oversaw the creation of the Federal Writers’ Project. This government program not only supported starving playwrights and the authors of now classic American fiction, but also sustained a national effort to collect the oral history of what many observers saw as the disappearing ethnic cultures of America’s immigrant populations. Among the ethnic groups interviewed were the “Syrians” of North Dakota. These immigrants arrived in North Dakota in the early 1900s, before the modern nation-states of Lebanon and Syria were founded. Because greater Syria was then ruled by the Ottoman Empire, Syrian immigrants were often classified as “Turks.” But as the reminiscences below show, they called themselves Syrians. While most of the immigrants who arrived on both South and North American shores were Maronite, Orthodox, and Melkite Christians, North Dakota’s Syrian population had an unusually high percentage of Muslims, estimated by some scholars who have done careful analysis of census data and land-ownership records to be around 30 percent of the total. These “sodbusters” were homesteaders who applied for and received a free forty-acre tract of land from the U.S. government in the first decade of the 1900s. On the prairie, they continued to observe the fast of Ramadan and celebrated the feast at the end of this month of dawn-to-dusk fasting by visiting one another’s homes. By the late 1920s or early 1930s, they constructed a mosque—a “half basement building of cement with a shallow gabled roof”—and established a Muslim cemetery, the latter of which still exists today. The interviews excerpted below, which are based on a common questionnaire used by the WPA interviewer, describe the transitions of two remarkable North Dakotans, one male and one female, who left what they*
often described as the temperate climate of Syria and Lebanon for the harsh winters of the American Great Plains.

County—Mountrail
Field worker—Everal J. McKinnon
Address—Ross, North Dakota
Informant—Mrs. Mary Juma
Interpreter—Mr. Charles Juma
Address—Ross, North Dakota
Section—23-156-92
Place of interview—Farm home

I was born in Byria, Rushia, Syria. I don’t know my exact age, but according to my naturalization papers, I am sixty-nine years old. I am sure that I am at least seventy-five years of age, however.

My home in Syria was a large, one-story, stone house. The floors were made of logs (about the size of our telephone poles), and the space between the poles was filled with smaller poles. Branches were used to fill small unfilled parts. A mixture of wet clay and lime was spread over the poles and branches, packed in hard, and smoothed by running a heavy roller over the floor. This was allowed to dry, and the result was a hard floor looking like cement. The roof was made in the same way.

Our village was located in a valley, and the land surrounding the village was level, extending two miles on each side of a river meeting rougher and more rolling land.

My religion in the Old Country was Moslem. We attended services every Friday, the same as we do here.

I received no education, as our people figured that it was a waste of time and money to teach a girl to read and write. There were no schools in our village, and those that were taught to read and write, were taught by a tutor.

Being a woman, I knew nothing about labor conditions, wages, renting, taxes, nor about farming methods. I know that everything was done the hard way. We didn’t have machinery to farm, and used oxen on a walking plow. Seeding, harvesting, and threshing was done by hand.

Parties were given only to celebrate such an occasion as a wedding. The kind of party given would depend on the financial condition of the family giving it. If the people were well-off, they would prepare for many and
invite the people from the nearby villages, and there would be much feast-
ing and dancing. The table was set all the time and people ate whenever they felt like it. When dancing, everyone danced alone, not in couples. There was one dance where many joined hands and danced in a circle, a great deal like our square dances here. These parties [lasted] for days sometimes.

A wedding in the Old Country was just the same as a Moslem wedding anywhere. There is no courting before the wedding. When a boy decides to marry a certain girl, he goes to her parents and tells them about it. If he is not of age, he tells his own mother and she goes to see the girls’ parents.

They then have a private discussion as to whether or not they should marry. The girl is not consulted at all. She, in most cases, is but a young miss of only eleven or twelve years of age. The outcome of the decision depends on the financial status of the prospective groom. An agreed amount of money is to be put aside by the groom in case of a separation. The separation must not be culminated through the fault of the bride if she is to receive that dowry. This amount varies. After the preliminary agreements are made, the date of the wedding is set. If the family of the groom is wealthy, the people from all the neighboring villages are invited to the ceremony and a feast is prepared. The bride names two witnesses for the ceremony, and then all is ready. The bride goes to an enclosure away from the ceremony and her father acts in her place. He clasps the hand of the groom and a handkerchief is draped over the clasped hands, and thus the vows are exchanged. After the ceremony, the feasting and celebrating begins.

My husband’s farm was very small. I don’t know the number of acres, but it wasn’t enough for us to but barely exist on. The people in our vicinity were migrating to America and kept writing back about the riches in America. Everyone wanted to move and we were a family of the many that contemplated leaving. We sold all our possessions and borrowed two-hundred dollars from a man, giving our land as a collateral.

A big farewell party was given in our honor, as there were twelve of us coming to America from that one village. It was a sad farewell as our relatives hated to see us leave. We feasted, danced, and played games at the party. The games were for men, which were feats of strength and endurance.

We left two daughters in the Old Country with relatives. One of the girls has died since, and the other one still lives there.
We went to Beirut, which was about thirty miles from our home, and caught a boat to France. It took us about three weeks to travel through France. I do not remember the name of the boat we took from there to America. It took us three weeks to come from France to Montreal, Canada.

We moved further inland and started to travel over that country with a horse and cart as peddlers. We stayed there only a few months, and then moved to Nebraska, in the United States. We traveled through the entire state in a year. We never had trouble making people understand what we wanted while peddling, but many times we were refused a place to sleep. We suffered the same conditions as the pioneers, and at times were even more uncomfortable.

We were in Canada in 1900, and in Nebraska in 1901. In 1902, we came to western North Dakota where we started to peddle. It was at the time when there was such an influx of people to take homesteads, and for no reason at all, we decided to try homesteading too.

We started clearing the land immediately, and within a year, had a horse, plow, disk, drag, and drill. We also had some cattle and chickens. When there was a very little work to do on the farm, my husband traveled to Minnesota and eastern North Dakota to peddle.

In 1903, my son, Charles, was born. He was the first Syrian child born in western North Dakota. We were the first Syrians to homestead in this community, but soon many people from that country came to settle here.

Our home has always been a gathering place for the Syrian folk. Not many parties or celebrations were held, except for occasions like a wedding or such. Before we built our church [mosque], we held services at the different homes. We have a month of fasting, after which everyone visits the home of another, and there was a lot of feasting.

I am pretty old now, and am confined to this wheel-chair because of my leg which was amputated two years ago. I miss my work, both indoor and outdoor, but still enjoy life.

We were always able to make a very good living by farming and raising livestock, until the death of my husband in February of 1918. My son then took over the management of the farm, and I have lived with his family since. The depression has made living hard, but I don’t worry.

Charles went to school in Ross until my husband died, and was not able to even complete the eighth grade.

We always speak in our native tongue at home, except my grand-children who won’t speak Syrian to their parents. They do speak in Syrian to me be-
cause I cannot speak nor understand English. My grand-children range from fourteen months of age to eight years, and there are four of them. . . .

I can’t read at all, neither in English nor Syrian. My son and daughter-in-law tell me the news they think might interest me.

We don’t have any recreation; we only work. Sometimes friends stop in to talk for awhile, and then we attend services every Friday too, but that is all. I sew a little occasionally, and like to hold the baby.

Our farm home is a low three-room house, with furnishings that are old and worn as a result of hard times and rough usage by children. The outside of the house has never been painted. Within, it is clean but shabby-looking. The barn is quite large with a hip roof, and is painted red.

The thing that sets this farm apart as a Syrian-American home is that all the buildings are located close to the house, and all the chickens and sheep come close, even to the doorstep of the house. . . .

There is too great a comparison to say much about America and my native land. This country has everything, and we have freedom. When we pay taxes, we get schools, roads, and an efficiency in the government. In the Old Country, we paid taxes and Turkey took all the money, and Syria receiving nothing in return. We were repaid by having Turkey force our boys to join her army. The climate in the Old Country was wonderful, but we [Americans] have such a climate down south.

If I had my life to live over, I would come to America sooner than I did. I would have liked to visit the people in Syria five or ten years ago, but now that I am helpless, I wouldn’t care to go. I don’t ever want to go back there to live.
village that I was born in had a population of about four hundred people. The land on the east of the village was level farm land and on the west at a short distance was mountains. My home was a one story six room stone building, about thirty by forty. The floor was made like all the other homes in the Old Country, poles about six inches in diameter were laid side by side on the ground. Then we mixed clay with water till it made a very thick mud, this was packed in between the poles and on top of the poles with a very heavy roller, then lime that we found was spread on the top of the clay while the clay was still wet and then the heavy roller was used some more until the lime was worked into the clay. When this became dry it would harden like cement. The floors for the second story of a two story house we made the same way.

I went to school one year. It wasn’t a school like in this country. Father paid a man, living in our town to write and read our Bible [Qur’an]. That was my education.

Father was a farmer and until I was a full grown man, I worked at home for father. When I was old enough to work out for others, I received about twenty-five cents a day.

Taxes in the Old Country was much different from here. Taxes there were figured according to what your crop produced. For instance, for every ten bushels that the farmer got from the crop, the government took one bushel.

For seven years, I farmed for myself in the Old Country. I farmed about forty acres, with a team of oxen, wooden plow equipped with an iron lay, the rest of the farm work such as seeding, reaping and threshing, I had to do by hand. I had one cow and about a dozen chickens, but no goats or sheep as most people had.

We had church services every Friday. I belonged to the Moslem church in the Old Country the same as I do in this country. We didn’t have any thing like confirmation.

For recreation we had parties, dances, and feasts. The parties were mostly like celebrations in this country, and would consist of competitive games and feats of athletics and strength. The sword-dance (as described to the field-worker was much the same as fencing in this country except that it was done to music and they danced among the crowd. The dance continued until such time as blood was drawn by one of competitors. A scratch of a finger would be enough. This dance was done by only certain men trained for the dance, it wasn’t everyone that could do it.)
When dances for everyone were held, the people did not dance in couples but danced single. Then there was a dance where a group would clasp hands and dance much similar to the square dance in this country.

After all arrangements for the wedding were completed, such as the consent of the girl’s parents, [an] amount of money set aside to provide for the bride in case the marriage proves a failure because of some fault of the groom, or desertion by the groom; this amount is set according to the financial condition of the groom. Then a feast is prepared for the crowd that is invited, the table remains set with all the food during the whole time of the celebration and the people can and do eat whenever they want to. A man, or boy, may make arrangements for the wedding whenever he sees a girl that he wants as his wife, the agreement is made between the man and the parents of the girl, or if the man is not of age the boy will tell his parents that he desires a certain girl and then his parents will make the arrangements with the parents of the girl. This agreement is sometimes made when the girl is only a few years old. When the ceremony takes place the bride goes to a room by herself and remains there alone until after the ceremony, she has named witnesses to act in her behalf. The father of the bride then clasps the hand of the groom and a cloth is draped over the clasped hands. The ceremony is then read from the Koran (our Bible). Then there is dancing and feasting for sometimes many days and nights.

In the old country I only had forty acres to farm and only one cow so it was very hard to make a living. A man couldn’t make a living by working out. Quite a few people from our town had already come to America and their letters told of lots of work for which they got big pay, free land to farm and live on, and much freedom. We didn't have any freedom in the Old Country as we were under the Turkish rule and we even had to be very careful what we said and the taxes we paid were taken by Turkey and we never got anything back for the taxes we paid. Our roads were terrible. Then the Turkish government made our men and boys serve in their army for sometimes many years.

When I left for America, I gave my land and things to my mother and sister, my father was dead. I borrowed seventy-five dollars besides the money I had saved, to make the trip. I brought only some clothes and enough food to last until I got to France. There were fifteen of us that left from our town at that time. H. A. Juma and Alley Farhart were in the group. I don’t remember the names of the rest. We left from Beirut the
spring of 1907 and sailed to Naples, Italy, on a cattle boat, from there we traveled through France by train and took a boat to Liverpool, England. I can’t remember sailing from England to Montreal, Canada. It seems to me that I was only on a boat two times on the whole trip. (Field Worker’s Note: Mrs. Abdallah tried to convince the informant that he must have crossed the ocean on a boat, but he could not recall it.)

I stayed in Montreal for one month and then came to Fargo, N.D., by train. I tried to peddle for about three months but I couldn’t make a living at that, so I took the train to Ashley, N.D. There were other Syrians already there and I went to work on a farm; worked on farms there for three years, making from twenty-five to thirty dollars a month. In 1911, I came to Ross. I worked out for four years and during threshing I got $1.25 a day. When working by the month I got $30. In 1915, I filed on a homestead sec. 12–157–92. I lived on my homestead for two years and then lived with Frank Osman for a year. I got my Naturalization papers Oct. 2, 1916. In 1918, I moved to New Rockford, N.D. I stayed in New Rockford for five months and worked in the section crew. In 1919, I moved to Detroit, Michigan, and worked in the factories for two and a half years. In 1921, I moved back to Ross, N.D., as I got married in 1920 and had to settle down and make a home. I have lived around Ross ever since. I rented three farms and in 1927, I bought the farm we are now living on.

When I first came to America, I thought America was pretty funny. The way people done things seemed funny. The people were always in a hurry and when they got done there didn’t seem to be any reason for the hurry. When they went someplace they were in a hurry; everything in the Old Country was much slower and people weren’t in a hurry. I didn’t like it for the first two years I was in America and many times I felt like I wanted to go back to the Old Country.

I couldn’t talk or understand the American language when I came here and when I was peddling I had to talk to people by motions and when I wanted to tell anyone the price of a thing, I would take money from my pocket and show them the amount of the price. When I wanted to ask for a place to sleep, I had to lay down on the floor and play that I was asleep and then they knew what I wanted. Nearly everyone felt sorry for me because I couldn’t talk their language. I remember one time when a bunch of people wanted to know what nationality I was so a man asked me if I was Jewish, and I nodded my head no. So he asked me if I was a sheeny [an archaic epithet for Jews]. It sounded enough like “Syrian” so I nodded my
head meaning yes. Everyone laughed very hard. It took me about two years to learn enough English to get along good.

I was attracted to my first American residence by other Syrians living in that community and an opportunity to make a living. That was at Ashley, N.D. Hassyn Murray and Frank Osman live there in a Russian settlement. I guess my real first residence was on my homestead at Ross, N.D., as before that I only worked for others. I lived there to prove up my homestead. The Syrians living at Ashley came from the Old Country.

When I first started farming in this country I had a plow, harrow, and binder. I farmed 100 acres when I started and in 1924 I farmed 240 acres. Now I farm 160 acres. My best crop was in 1925, I had a real good crop that year. I believe, in fact my steadiest income has been from cattle and sheep. Until 1934 we depended mostly on the cattle, since it was so dry we have depended more on the sheep. I have 106 head of sheep, 9 cows, and 7 horses. I have more machinery now and do all my farming with horses. In 1934 I was forced to sell 39 head of cattle to the government because I didn’t have feed for them.

I have not been able to make anything farming since 1929. I belong to the Agricultural Conservation Association. If it weren’t for this there wouldn’t be any money in trying to raise a crop. I don’t think we live any different now than we did before there was a depression. If we can’t eat good there wouldn’t be any use living. It was hard to have to sell my cattle to the government for so little money but they would have starved if had tried to keep them. I think the depression was because of the war.

My wife was born in Rufage, Rushia, Syria. We don’t know the date of her birth but it was in the year 1886. (Field Worker’s Note: Mrs. Abdallah told as a joke: there are several of the Syrians here that don’t know their age, and they never get to be over 55 or 60 years old. I guess I am like the rest of them. Because of military reasons nobody in the old country kept track of their age and they still don’t know. I am sure that some of them can’t tell within 15 or 20 years of their correct age.) Mrs. Abdallah was married and had two children in the old country before coming to America. One of these was a girl and she remained in the old country and is married, the other also a girl born in 1910 in Rufage, Rushia, Syria. Her name is Nozema, now married. Sarah [was] born at Medina, N.D., born in 1914 (date of birth can be found in write-up on Allay Omar, as she is now Mrs. Omar). She completed the eighth grade in Ross Public School. Alley born July 4, 1915, at New Rockford, N.D. completed 6th grade. . . .
We (meaning Syrians) have a religious belief concerning the butchering of meat. We believe that an animal should not be shot or hit in the head to kill it. It should be bled to death. We think that when an animal is shot or hit in the head, the evil and sins remain in the meat and it is a sin to eat this meat. We also know that when an animal is butchered our way the blood drains from the meat better and in this way the meat is a lighter color and it will keep much longer. There is another old country belief that to pass a comment when looking at a newly born baby, such as saying that the baby is good looking, etc., will make the baby become sick. We also have a Syrian way of blessing and saying thanks for our food on the table before eating even one bite. We believe that it is a sin to eat without saying this (cannot give it in English).

[We don't have much recreation] besides going to town, listening to the radio, the children try to play the mouth organ and the guitar. Sometimes we go to the neighbors to visit but most times we have work enough to keep us busy. The boys do a lot of trapping and hunting here in these hills and they like the sport of it and the cash they get out of it. My wife does a lot of sewing and the girls also do some of this.

[Field Worker’s Note] There was nothing about the farm or the home to set it aside as a Syrian American home. One frame barn, and one straw barn, a few small frame sheds and a frame house. All the buildings are badly in need of paint. The house consists of three large rooms and an attached coal shed downstairs, upstairs there are two rooms. I can say that this is an exceptionally clean and well managed house. I ate dinner with the family and for dinner we had chicken that had been cooked with a stew, but served separate. The stew contained potatoes, onions, and a number of other vegetables cooked with tomatoes and well seasoned. Then there was a large platter of fried potatoes, a plate of home made cheese (made from sweet milk), Syrian bread (much the same as lefse), home-made cookies and cake and plum sauce and tea (green). The table was set the same as other peoples table with salt, pepper, sugar, butter, etc. . . .

I suppose that the Old Country has changed a lot since I left there but at that time the work was very hard, as everything had to be done by hand, while in this country the work was really very easy as most of it was done by machinery even at that time. In the Old Country the climate is much better than here and it seemed to make old people feel young. You could work hard all day and go to bed real tired and when you wake up in
the morning you feel as if you had never worked, while here a night’s sleep doesn’t make you feel that good. It sometimes snows a foot or more over there but still the people go bare-footed and the water under the snow feels as warm as though it had been warmed on the stove for about fifteen minutes. The water on the top of the ground is always too warm to drink and be good. I think that is the only way that the old country is better. In this country we get improvements for our tax money and we can think and say what we think while in the Old Country we could think what we wanted but we didn’t dare say it.

In the Old Country we planted our winter wheat in August and planted our spring crop in April. Our harvest came in June.

If I had my life to live over again, I’d likely do about the same things only I’d come to America when I was younger and I settle down and stay there. I’d maybe settle in the state of Michigan or in No. Dak. I would get married younger and try to save for my old age. I wouldn’t try to raise much crop if I was on a farm; I’d go into cattle and sheep. I can’t really say that I am sorry that I lived the way I have because I have always enjoyed life.
refused to abandon the fight for black liberation, saying he felt his first duty was to help persons of African descent achieve full equality. Until his death in 1965, he proudly proclaimed his religious identity as an “orthodox” Muslim and as a black revolutionary.

After Malcolm X’s death, black Muslims interpreted his call for both political and religious liberation in different ways, incorporating more and more Islamic traditions learned from immigrant and foreign Muslims into their religious practice while also articulating a political and social program that had relevance for black America. Like some fellow Muslim activists across the seas, at least a few African American Muslims separated themselves from mainstream society and formed vanguards that strictly followed the precepts of *shari’a*, or Islamic law and ethics. For example, a predominately African American group of believers broke away from Shaikh Daoud’s Islamic Mission of America to form the Yasin mosque. Criticizing the lax religious practices of some assimilated Muslims, they insisted on more literal adherence to *shari’a*. Other African American Muslims, however, focused on more active community involvement and on building a multiethnic Islam. In the late 1960s, Sheik Tawfiq, an African American from Florida, founded the Mosque of the Islamic Brotherhood in Harlem, New York. Stressing the call of Islamic universalism, the idea that Islam crossed all racial barriers, African Americans, Hispanics, and others prayed together, established housing and education programs, and ran small businesses in the heart of the United States’ largest city. Such groups blurred the important social distinctions between immigrant and indigenous by emphasizing common religious roots.

Despite or perhaps because of the diversity of American Muslim groups and persons during this era, one can safely conclude that by this time, Islam was no passing fad in the American religious landscape. From World War I to 1965, Americans established “Islam,” however one defined it, as an institutional presence and a vital aspect of American culture and society. The simultaneously entangled and separate histories of indigenous and immigrant Muslims sparked its growth and insured its relevance.

1. Pir Inayat Khan, “America: 1910–1912” (c. 1925)

*Inayat Khan (1882–1927), a musician and modern mystic from British India, visited the United States from 1910 through 1912 and again during the 1920s*
for a lecture tour. During his stay in the United States, the pir, a title meaning master, met and married his wife, Ora Ray Baker, who was a relative of the famous Mary Baker Eddy, the mother of Christian Science. Inayat Khan settled in Europe, but his philosophies also took root on American soil. The founder of the Sufi Order in the West, he taught his followers to challenge religious exclusivism and form cross-cultural, cross-confessional communities in search of beauty and harmony. He encouraged them to meditate, to treat others always with dignity, and to hear the sounds of the Divine in the world around them. His philosophies revealed a number of civilizational influences—in his words one hears ancient Greek, Islamic, Indian, and modern Euro-American voices. Such ecumenism found a ready audience among religious liberals and seekers in the United States who had already been exposed to Asian religious traditions through various movements like theosophy and American Orientalist literature. The Sufi Order of the West, now Sufi Order International, continued after the pir’s death, headed by his son, Vilayat Inayat Khan, and later his grandson, Zia Inayat Khan. Other American Sufi organizations to follow in Inayat Khan’s footsteps include Sufi Ruhaniat International and the International Sufi movement. In this passage from his memoirs, Inayat Khan looks back fondly on his 1910–1912 stay in America but also offers criticisms of American racism, capitalism, and the fast pace of American life.

I was transported by destiny from the world of lyric and poetry to the world of industry and commerce, on the 13th of September 1910. I bade farewell to my motherland, the soil of India, the land of the sun, for America the land of my future, wondering: “perhaps I shall return some day”, and yet I did not know how long it would be before I should return. The ocean that I had to cross seemed to me a gulf between the life that was passed and the life which was to begin. I spent my moments on the ship looking at the rising and falling of the waves and realizing in this rise and fall the picture of life reflected, the life of individuals, of nations, of races, and of the world. I tried to think where I was going, why I was going, what I was going to do, what was in store for me. “How shall I set to work? Will the people be favorable or unfavorable to the Message which I am taking from one end of the world to the other?” It seemed my mind moved curiously on these questions, but my heart refused to ponder upon them even for a moment, answering . . . one constant voice I always heard coming from within, urging me constantly onward to my task, saying:
“Thou art sent on Our service, and it is We Who will make thy way clear.” This alone was my consolation.

This period while I was on the way, was to me a state which one experiences between a dream and an awakening; my whole part in India became one single dream, not a purposeless dream, but a dream preparing me to accomplish something toward which I was proceeding. There were moments of sadness, of feeling myself removed further and further from the land of my birth, and moments of great joy, with the hope of nearing the Western regions for which my soul was destined. And at moments I felt too small and little for my ideals and inspirations, comparing my limited self with this vast world. But at moments, realizing Whose work it was, Whose service it was, Whose call it was, the answer which my heart gave moved me to ecstasy, as if I had risen in the realization of Truth above the limitations which weigh mankind down.

When our ship arrived in the harbor of New York, the first land of my destination, I saw before me the welcoming figure of the statue of Liberty, an idol of rock, which I felt was awaiting the hour to turn into an ideal, awaiting the moment to rise from material liberty to spiritual liberty. Its wings suggested to me that it wanted to spread from national liberty to world liberty.

My first impression of New York, the city of modern grandeur, was that of a world quite other than those I had seen or known before. The grand, high buildings, the illuminations in all the shops, people moving about in crowds, conveyances running on three levels: tramways, subway, and elevators running overhead, people running at the station, each with a leather bag in his hand, and a newspaper. Everything seemed moving, not only the trains but even the stations, every moment filled with the rush of activity, calling to every sense, on the ears and on the eyes. It was removed from the land I had come from by a distance as wide as the expansion of the vast ocean which separated these two lands.

I soon began to try to get accustomed to the people, to the atmosphere, and to the country. And as I came of that people whose principal characteristic is adaptability, it was not too difficult for me to attune myself to the people and the conditions there. As the Message I brought was the Message of unity, it was natural that I should give proof in my own life of unity with people and conditions, however different and far removed. I saw in the people of America the sum-total of modern progress. I called it “the Land of the Day”; that for which Rumi [the famous medieval poet]
has used in the *Masnavi* the word “Dunya”, the worldly life, to which the word “Samsara” is equivalent in Hindi, I found there in its fullness. The first opportunity I had of making the acquaintance of some people in America, was in the studio of Mr. Edmund Russell, who gave a reception where I met with some people among whom I found some responsive persons. I came to America with the Sufi Message, but the only means which I had to carry out my mission was by music, my profession, in which my cousin Ali Khan and my two brothers Maheboob Khan and Musheraff Khan assisted me. But my music which was most valued and admired as science and art, was put to a hard test in a foreign land, where it was as the old coins brought to a currency bank.

Now before me there was the question: how to set to work and in what direction? For the Message the time was not yet ripe, as I was at that time rather studying the psychology of the people than teaching. In a busy place like America where in the professional world already great competition exists, to have an opening for concerts or an opportunity to sing at the Opera seemed for the moment an impossible thing. I met with the well-known singer Emma Thursby who, being a great artist herself, became interested in our music.

My first address to the people of America was arranged at Columbia University in New York by Dr. Reebner, and there I found a great response. Dr. Reebner, the Head of Music at the University was most interested in Indian music and we became friends. Among the audience was Miss Ruth St. Denis who invented Indian dances of her own and was making a speciality of it, and for whom our music became as a color and fragrance to an imitation flower. She tried to introduce the Indian music on the program of her performance, which was to me as a means to an end. We had an interesting tour together throughout the States, and yet for the public, which was for amusement, our music became merely an entertainment. This was an amusement for them, and therefore painful for us. Also it was not satisfactory to combine real with imitation. However it helped to keep the wolf away from our door.

I once visited the house of Miss Ruth St. Denis after a long time and saw to my surprise that all the Indian things that were in her room as a decoration, had been removed altogether and in their place Japanese things were placed, which amused me. She then entered the room, in a Japanese kimono, which surprised me still more. I said to her, “Now I have found out the reason why you have not seen us for a long time. It seems you have
forgotten India altogether.” She said, “I am trying to forget it, though I find it difficult to forget. For now that I have to produce a Japanese dance, I do not wish to think of India any longer.” It explained to me what influence the power of concentration makes upon one’s life and work, that when the whole surrounding is inspiring a person with one particular idea, it creates in his soul the spirit of the desired object, and in this lies the mystery of life. I found Miss Ruth St. Denis an inventive genius, and I was struck with a witty answer she gave upon hearing my ideas about human brotherhood, uniting East and West. She said, “Yes, we, the people of the Occident and Orient may be brothers, but not twins.”

Before ending our tour in the States I spoke at the University of Los Angeles, and to a very large audience at the Berkeley University of San Francisco where I met with a very great response, and where my lectures on, and my representation of Indian music and the presentation of its ideal met with a great interest.

At the end of my tour through the United States, when I arrived at San Francisco, I found the meaning of the scheme of Providence, that I was meant to come to San Francisco, a land full of psychic powers and cosmic currents, and begin from there the work of my Message. It is here that I found my first mureed [student] Mrs. Ada Martin.

I was welcomed by Swami Trigunatita and his collaborator Swami Paramananda, who requested me to speak on Indian music to their friends at the Hindu temple, and was presented with a gold medal and an address.

I saw among the audience a soul who was drinking in all I said, as the Hamsa, the bird of Hindu mythology, who takes the extract from the milk leaving the water. So this soul listened to my lecture on music and grasped the philosophical points which appealed to her most. She thanked me, as everybody came to show their appreciation after the lecture. But I saw that there was some light kindled there in that particular soul. Next day I received a letter near to my time of departure from San Francisco, saying that this lady was immensely impressed by the Message, though it was given under the cover of an address on music and would most appreciate some further light on the path. I knew that she received the call, and wrote her that I regretted very much that I was leaving, but yet I could be seen at Seattle, a city at a considerable distance from San Francisco. I had a vision that night that the whole room became filled with light, no trace of darkness was to be found. I certainly thought that there was some important thing that was to be done next day, which I found was the initiation of
Mrs. Ada Martin, the first mureed on my arrival to the West and, knowing that this soul will spread light and illuminate all those who will come in contact with her, I initiated her and named her Rabia after the name of a great woman Sufi saint of Basra, about whom so much is spoken in the East. Since her initiation she has entirely devoted her life to spiritual contemplation and the service of humanity.

After my return from San Francisco to New York, I stayed a while to be able to do some work and gave a few lectures at the Sanskrit College where I made the acquaintance of Baba Bharati, who preached the love of Krishna to the Americans. I made there the acquaintance of Mr. Bjerregaard, who afterwards wrote on my request the book called “Sufism and Omar Khayyam”. He was the only student of Sufism known in New York, and he helped me to have access to the Sufi literature in the Astor Library, of which he was the head.

Ralph Perish, Miss Genie Nawn and Mrs. Logan were made mureeds, and later Miss Collins and Mrs. Eldering and also Mrs. Morrison. Among them there was a mureed who showed no end of respect, devotion and interest in the Cause, and yet there was something in him which voiced to me his hidden insincerity. He followed me for a considerable time, till his patience was exhausted. In the end he gave way to his weakness, admitting he could not go on any longer. I then found out that he had been sent by some society which collected the teachings of different secret orders, where initiations were given, its members entering somewhere or the other in every order of inner cult. It made me very sad, more for him than for me, to think how he wasted his time for nothing. He came, trying to steal something which can never be stolen. Truth is not the portion of the insincere ones. Sincerity alone is the bowl that can hold Truth. I then called Mrs. Martin, who had by then progressed wonderfully—which consoled me—to whom the robe of Murshida was given; and the care of a grain of the Message, which was cast in the soil of America, was entrusted to her before I left the United States for Europe. She represented the Sufi Message at the religious congress in San Francisco at the Panama Canal World Fair.

During my stay in America for more than two years there was not much done in the furtherance of the Sufi Movement. From my stay in America I began to learn the psychology of the people in the West and the way in which my mission should be set to work. If I can recall any great achievement in America, it was to have found the soul who was destined to be my life’s partner.
With the liberal idea of freedom in all directions of life and in spite of Abraham Lincoln’s liberal example and reform, there is still to be found in America a prejudice against color which is particularly shown to the Negroes who were for a long time in slavery, and since their freedom the prejudice has become still greater. It seems almost impossible to think that in a country which is most up-to-date in civilization, there should be a population so looked down upon. Yes, in India there are *shudras*, lower castes who are called untouchable. Yet there have been scientific reasons, from a hygienic point of view, for not touching them, and the attitude of the high caste towards them has never been that of hatred. The men and women of that pariah class in India are called by others *mehter*, which means master. Yes, the people in America have their reason for it. They think Negroes are too backward in evolution to associate with. But to me it seems that the coming race will be the race of Negroes; they are showing it from now. In whatever walk of life they find an opportunity, they come forward in competition. Not only in wrestling or boxing, but also on the stage the Negroes show their splendor, and the most surprising thing to me was that, conscious of all the prejudice against the Negro from all around, he does not allow his ego to be affected by it. In every position of outward humiliation he is put to, he stands upright with a marvelous spirit, which I only wished the man in the East had, who has become as a soil worn-out after a thousand harvests. The spirit in the East seemed to me deadened, being weighed down by autocratic influences, tramped upon by foreign powers, crucified by high moral and spiritual ideals, and long starved by poverty.

An ordinary man in America confuses an Indian with brown skin with the Negro. Even if he does not think that he is a Negro, still he is accustomed to look with contempt at a dark skin, in spite of the many most unclean, ignorant and ill-mannered specimens of white people who are to be found there on the spot. I did not find so much prejudice existing in America against a Japanese, of which so much has been said. Still in answer to the unchristian attitude of theirs, the government of Japan has all along threatened them with the Mosaic law, and is ready to return the same when the Americans visit Japan. Indians, when insulted abroad, can do nothing but bear it patiently. The color prejudice in some nations of Europe is even more, but it is often hidden under the garb of politeness and not so freely expressed as in America; the difference is between a grown-up person and a child in his expression of prejudice.
An American as a friend is very agreeable and desirable and most sociable. One feels affection, spontaneity in his feelings, although the business faculty is most pronounced in him, yet together with it he is most generous. The American readily responds to the idea of universal brotherhood. He is open to study any religion or philosophy, although it is a question if he would like to follow a certain religion long enough, because freedom, which is the goal, by many in America is taken as the way, and therefore, before starting the journey towards spiritual freedom, they want the way also to be a way of freedom, which is impossible. I have seen among Americans people of a thorough good nature and their life itself a religion, people of principle and gentleness. The broad outlook of the people in America gave me a great hope and a faith that it is this spirit which in time must bring the universal idea to the view of the world. It is most admirable for a great nation to bring forward the idea of world disarmament, when many other nations are fully absorbed in covetousness, and submerged in their own interests. This idea of disarmament brought out by President Harding, was responded to by the public there. This shows the bent of their mind. Besides, to friends or enemies, in their trouble, whenever the occasion has arisen, America has most generously come first to their rescue.

With all the modern spirit in America I found among the people love for knowledge, search for truth, and tendency to unity. I found them full of life, enthusiasm, and goodwill, which promises that this modern nation, although it is now in its childhood, will become a youth who will lead the world towards progress.


The Ahmadiyya movement has converted persons around the globe to its interpretation of Islam. While Ahmadi practitioners constitute a minority of Muslims in the United States, their strong missionary presence in the 1920s left an indelible mark on the shape of American Muslim thought and practice. The history of Ahmadiyya in the United States proves that from the very
beginning, some American Muslim communities were multiracial and multiethnic. At the same time, the writings below help us understand how the Ahmadiyya influenced the development of Islam among black Americans in particular. The South Asian publishers of the paper promoted Islam as a religious tradition that offered equality and brotherhood to all, regardless of skin color, but also depicted Islam as a tradition particularly well suited for building black unity and Afro-Asian cooperation. The Ahmadi emphasis on Islam as a vehicle of black manhood, self-reliance, and self-determination both recalled Edward Blyden’s claims and anticipated Elijah Muhammad’s philosophies. Such interpretations of Islam also indicated that the Ahmadiyya were attempting to cooperate and/or compete with Marcus Garvey’s popular Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), a pan-Africanist movement of the 1920s that advocated black capitalism, political independence, race pride, and emigration to Africa.

The last article excerpted here, P. Nathaniel Johnson’s “Living Flora—and Dead,” gives an additional explanation for the attraction of African Americans to Islam. For Johnson, an African American convert and Ahmadi leader who took the name Ahmad Din, the revelations of God in the Qur’an expressed timeless truths and even divulged secret knowledge about the nature of the universe. Shaikh Ahmad, a religious seeker who experimented with many religions before coming to Islam, viewed Prophet Muhammad of Arabia as a master spiritualist who bridged the divide between God and humankind through the revelation of the Qur’an. His view that God was not only transcendent but also imminent—that human beings could experience the presence of God more deeply through Islam—represented a synthesis of Islamic thought and American metaphysical religion, a product of the transnational encounter between Americans like Johnson and South Asian Ahmadi missionaries.

_I Am a Moslem (1921)_

I am a Moslem. And do you know what a Moslem is? Is it the name of some particular exclusive nationality? No, a Moslem belongs to all. He knows no difference of nations as all the nations are his own. Does he belong to any one country? No. On his Map of the Globe there are no border lines. Is he white or is he colored? He knows no such distinctions, which are only skin deep. The Moslem eye looks at the heart and not at the outer shape. He
concerns the Dwellers in the tent and not the tent. Is Moslem Male or Female? He knows no gender in the uplift of the soul. Men and women all are children of God, all come from Him and all return to Him. A Moslem is one who has resigned his will to God. A Moslem is he or she who belongs to God and God alone. A Moslem is one who sympathizes with all and hurts none. The Moslem enjoys his love for God. He is always ready to sacrifice his desires for the sake of God and His people. In and out he is one and the same. He practices what he preaches. He is sincere in his promises. His one goal is his Creator, his Provider and his God—God of Infinity towards whom he continues soaring higher and higher in Infinity. His progress is ever onward and onward as his Beloved One is Infinite. He is in Union with God and he is in Communion with Him. Abraham was a Moslem, Moses was a Moslem, David was a Moslem, Jesus was a Moslem, Ahmad was a Moslem, but Muhammad was the greatest Moslem that the world has ever seen. A Moslem is an Abraham, and a Moslem is a Christ and a Moslem is a Muhammad as he loves, follows, and imitates all the great Teachers from Allah. Be a Moslem and join the Universal Brotherhood.

True Salvation of the “American Negroes”:
The Real Solution of the Negro Question (1923)

My dear American Negro, As-Salaam-o-Alaikum. Peace be with you and the mercy of Allah. The Christian profiteers brought you out of your native lands of Africa and in Christianising you made you forget the religion and language of your forefather—which were Islam and Arabic. You have experienced Christianity for so many years and it has proved to be no good. It is a failure. Christianity cannot bring real brotherhood to man, especially to a fallen and downtrodden nation. So now leave it alone. Join Islam, the real faith of universal brotherhood which at once does away with all distinctions of race, color, and creed. The holy Quran is the true book of God. You need a religion which teaches manliness, self-reliance, self-respect, and self-effort. Islam does not teach you the vicarious sacrifice, nor does it teach you that all human nature is corrupt and thus make you suffer needlessly. Islam frees you from all sorts of debasing associations and idolatry. Mohammed does not tell you not to live a full life here in this world; he tells you the world is good, therefore you must make the most of
it. Islam does not say sell all you have, it says get all the good you can out of this life and make it a good start for the life to come for our future is to be shaped on our present. It is not a bad world we live in. Moreover you can be good Moslems in America as well as in Asia, Europe, and Africa. Join Islam in the Ahmadiya Movement founded by Ahmad of India, the Prophet of the day, and be blessed. For further particulars address all communications to the undersigned.

Muhammad Din.
Ahmadiya Movement
4448 So. Wabash Ave.
Chicago, Ill. U.S.A.

*Crescent or Cross: A Negro May Aspire to Any Position Under Islam Without Discrimination (1923)*

The Teaching of the Prophet Is Being Profitably Imbibed—With Millions of Moslems the World Over Pressure Can Be Brought to Solve the Race Question.

Apart from a confederation of the African tribes or peoples of African origin, the possibility of which is an awful nightmare to the white man, he lives in fear and trembling that El Islam may become the religion of the Negro. And why should it not be? “El Islam” would be a wonderful spiritual force in the life of the colored races, uniting us in a bond of common sympathy and interest. We could then add to our motto of one God, one aim, one destiny, the words one language, and that language would be Arabic. It could easily be made the universal language of Negroes and would remove the barriers which now face us in the intercommunication of the different tribes in Africa. Arabic is already spoken by millions of Negroes.

Most white missionaries in order to keep up and encourage contributions to their foreign mission fund sometimes draw upon their imagination when they speak of the number of converts to Christianity, and would have us believe that the poor heathen is anxious to see more white men leading them to peace and happiness. The majority of the converts to Christianity in India and Africa are of the lower caste, people who have nothing to lose by changing their religious views and practices, but who expect in the new order of things to become the social equal of their superiors. They belong to
that type which toadies to the white man and tamely submits to segregation and discrimination, believing that the white master is good, holy, just and meek.

In spite, however, of the desperate efforts being made by the “other fellow” to convert the African to Christianity in order to make his enslavement and exploitation easier and more secure, the African is slowly but surely realizing that under the Crescent he will be better able to reach the goal of his ambition than under the Cross. British administrators sometimes inadvertently admit that the Mohammedan natives are far superior in intelligence, morals and fighting spirit to the Christian native.

El Islam teaches its followers to be manly, self-respecting, charitable and ambitious, and, unlike his Christian brother, who waits for the good white man to restore him his rights, the follower of the prophet is always ready to draw his sword in defense of sacred right and honor.

Within recent years 53,000,000 natives have been converted to Mohammedanism in Africa. In Southern Nyasaland, where in 1900 you could not meet one native Mohammedan, there are mosques all over the country. In the region between Durba[n] and the Cape 1,000,000 natives were converted to Mohammed . . . last year. Under Islam a Negro may aspire to and attain any position in mosque or state, and Islam knows nothing of segregation and discrimination.

Yes, El Islam is spreading fast, and spreading not only in Africa but also in these United States. Within three months over 100 converts have been made to the cause of Mohammedanism in America. The spreading of El Islam cannot help but benefit the U.N.I.A. for they are desperately engaged in preparing for That Day—that day that we of the Universal are also preparing for.

*Living Flora—and Dead* (1924)

In the field of religious literature Mohammed’s Koran is the healthiest plant with the hardiest stalk, produces the sweetest bloom and yields the more wholesome fruit.

The soil which gave to it healthy growth was rich beyond comparison. Allah’s abundance made its foliage green, its blossoms beautiful, and its yield so heavy that whosoever reaps has but to enjoy an everlasting harvest.
This plant of which I speak, grew from the true seed to maturity; no grafting on of other plants, no artificial irrigation, no pruning to make it trim was necessary, this plant—QURAN!

Other plants in the field of religious literature? Let us review them. Their seeds were true but ah! look at them now! How sad! Much deliberate meddling has been done.

Perusing a certain Holy Book I found it to be a plant withered, barely being kept alive by artificial watering not at all green—dying! This book, The Torah—Talmud of Judaism. I perused another Holy Book and it was found to be a plant faded, green stems and a few green leaves from true vines grafted on to give it the appearance of life. This book, The Vedas of Hindoos. The perusal of another Holy Book found it to be a plant already dead from too much pruning. This book, The Gospels. Besides these, some others I perused, finding them all decadent Al Quran excepted.

The Sun of Tradition glowed dimly down through the clouds of Mythology, the atmosphere was dry, the rainbow hung westward on the horizon signifying also that the life-giving rains had passed. Blasted Gardens! But the Prophet’s Quran stood as a lone apple tree among the other trees of the garden. Consider the Holy Prophet and his Koran. Take the sent One all in all, what he was, what he accomplished, and the good he inspired others to do. Compare him with all other poets, law-givers, prophets, sons of God, statesmen, etc.; and the son of Abdallah alone stands above all other men that mankind has called “GREAT.”

Other bibles are mostly the works of an aggregation of poets, prophets, prophetesses, statesmen and lawgivers, historically covering thousands of years, crammed full of conflicting statements. The Koran comes straight from the mouth of the man who proves himself to be the “MASTER MIND” of the earth.

The Quran is a poem, a code of laws, a prayer book, and the world’s best bible combined. THE MAN UNIQUE! THE BOOK UNIQUE! As in a looking glass we behold the MASTER SPIRITUALIST of the world intoxicated with the gifts of God.

O, ye howlers and spillers of ink! Climb Mount Sinai and swim the river Jordan, baptize yourselves in pools of blood, rattle the dry bones in Ezekiel’s valley, but the echo of it all is dead after all allowance is made.

Sheik Ahmad Din.
(P. Nathaniel Jo[h]nson)

*Much of the Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple, a sixty-page scripture, was borrowed from other texts. Chapters 1 through 19 were taken from Levi Dowling’s 1908 *Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*, a kind of modern gospel that depicted Jesus as a spiritual peripatetic who wandered around the ancient world teaching others to master their own higher spiritual powers. Chapters 20 through 44 were copied from a Rosicrucian ethics manual that was published as *Unto Thee I Grant and The Infinite Wisdom*. But the excerpts reproduced below, which are derived from an early version of the text available through the FBI file on the Moorish Science Temple (MST), seem to be from the hand of Prophet Noble Drew Ali himself. In these passages, the popular black nationalist Marcus Garvey, founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, is understood as a forerunner to Noble Drew Ali. Noble Drew, the text explains, is a prophet chosen by God to lead the Moorish nation in America (that is, black people) to confess and practice their original religion of Islam. The text explains the complicated reasons why African Americans forgot their true identity, emphasizing that, because the end of the world is imminent, the time for a return to their roots is now. The scripture strongly rejects the idea that there is a “negro, black, or colored race,” instead emphasizing that blacks are members of the Moorish nation, the Asiatic race, and the Islamic religion. The establishment of racial harmony and world peace is possible, Noble Drew promises, if each group of humans will gather unto itself and cease amalgamation with other races, nations, and creeds. Though Noble Drew was killed in 1929, his movement continued to grow, establishing lodges across the United States by the 1940s. The popularity of the MST declined as the Nation of Islam rose to prominence after World War II, but various claimants would keep Noble Drew’s legacy alive, offering new interpretations of Moorish Science.*

*Chapter XLV*

**THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF THE ASIATIC NATIONS**

1. The fallen sons and daughters of the Asiatic Nation of North America need to learn to love instead of hate; and to know their higher self and
lower self. This is the uniting of the Holy Koran of Mecca, for teaching and instructing all Moorish Americans, etc.

2. The key of civilization was and is in the hands of the Asiatic nations. The Moorish, who were ancient Moabites, and the founders of the Holy City of Mecca.

3. The Egyptians who were the Hamathites, and of a direct descendant of Mizraim, the Arabians, the seed of Hagar, Japanese and Chinese.

4. The Hindoos of India, the descendants of the ancient Canaanites, Hittites, and Moabites of the land of Canaan.

5. The Asiatic nations of North, South, and Central America; the Moorish Americans and Mexicans of North America, Brazilians, Argentineans and Chileans in South America.

6. Columbians, Nicaraguans, and the natives of San Salvador in Central America, etc. All of these are Moslems.

7. The Turks are the true descendants of Hagar, who are the chief protectors of the Islamic Creed of Mecca; beginning from Mohammed the First, the founder of the uniting of Islam, by the command of the great universal God-Allah.

Chapter XLVI

THE BEGINNING OF CHRISTIANITY

1. The foundation of Christianity began in Rome. The Roman nations founded the first Church, which crucified Jesus of Nazareth for seeking to redeem His people from under the Roman yoke and law.

2. Jesus himself was of the true blood of the ancient Canaanites and Moabites and the inhabitants of Africa.

3. Seeking to redeem His people in those days from the pressure of the pale skin nations of Europe, Rome crucified Him according to their law.

4. Then Europe had peace for a long time until Mohammed the First came upon the scene and fulfilled the works of Jesus of Nazareth.

5. The holy teaching of Jesus was to the common people, to redeem them from under the great pressure of the hands of the unjust. That the rulers and the rich would not oppress the poor. Also that the lion and the lamb may lay down together and neither would be harmed when morning came.
6. These teachings were not accepted by the rulers, neither by the rich; because they loved the principles of the tenth commandment.

7. Through the tenth commandment the rulers and the rich live, while the poor suffer and die.

8. The lamb is the poor people, the lion is the rulers and the rich, and through Love, Truth, Peace, Freedom, and Justice all men are one and equal to seek their own destiny; and to worship under their own vine and fig tree. After the principles of the holy and divine laws of their forefathers.

9. All nations of the earth in these modern days are seeking peace, but there is but one true and divine way that peace may be obtained in these days, and it is through Love, Truth, Peace, Freedom, and Justice being taught universally to all nations, in all lands.

Chapter XLVII

EGYPT, THE CAPITAL EMPIRE OF THE DOMINION OF AFRICA

1. The inhabitants of Africa are the descendants of the ancient Canaanites from the land of Canaan.

2. Old man Cush and his family are the first inhabitants of Africa who came from the land of Canaan.

3. His father Ham and his family were second. Then came the word Ethiopia, which means the demarcation line of the dominion of Amexem, the first true and divine name of Africa. The dividing of the land between the father and the son.

4. The dominion of Cush, North-East and South-East Africa and North-West and South-West was his father’s dominion of Africa.

5. In later years many of their brethren from Asia and the Holy Lands joined them.

6. The Moabites from the land of Moab who received permission from the Pharaohs of Egypt to settle and inhabit North-West Africa; they were the founders and are the true possessors of the present Moroccan Empire. With their Canaanite, Hittite, and Amorite brethren who sojourned from the land of Canaan seeking new homes.

7. Their dominion and inhabitation extended from North-East and South-West Africa, across great Atlantis even unto the present North,
South, and Central America and also Mexico and the Atlantis Islands; before the great earthquake, which caused the great Atlantic Ocean.

8. The River Nile was dredged and made by the ancient Pharaohs of Egypt, in order to trade with the surrounding kingdoms. Also the Niger river was dredged by the great Pharaoh of Egypt in those ancient days for trade, and it extends eastward from the River Nile, westward across the great Atlantic. It was used for trade and transportation.

9. According to all true and divine records of the human race there is no negro, black, or colored race attached to the human family, because all the inhabitants of Africa were and are of the human race, descendants of the ancient Canaanite nation from the holy land of Canaan.

10. What your ancient forefathers were, you are today without doubt or contradiction.

11. There is no one who is able to change man from the descendant nature of his forefathers; unless his power extends beyond the great universal Creator Allah Himself.

12. These holy and divine laws are from the Prophet, Noble Drew Ali, the founder of the uniting of the Moorish Science Temple of America.

13. These laws are to be strictly preserved by the members of all the Temples, of the Moorish Science Temple of America. That they will learn to open their meeting and guide it according to the principles of Love, Truth, Peace, Freedom and Justice.

14. Every subordinate Temple of the Grand-Major Temple is to form under the covenant of Love, Truth, Peace, Freedom and Justice; and create their own laws and customs, in conjunction with the laws of the Holy Prophet and the Grand Temple. I, the Prophet, Noble Drew Ali, was sent by the great God, Allah, to warn all Asiatics of America to repent from their sinful ways; before that great and awful day which is sure to come.

15. The time has come when every nation must worship under its own vine and fig tree, and every tongue must confess his own.

16. Through sin and disobedience every nation has suffered slavery, due to the fact that they honored not the creed and principles of their forefathers.

17. That is why the nationality of the Moors was taken away from them in 1774 and the word negro, black and colored, was given to the Asiatics of America who were of Moorish descent, because they honored not the principles of their mother and father, and strayed after the gods of Europe of whom they knew nothing.
Chapter XLVIII

THE END OF TIME AND THE FULFILLING
OF THE PROPHESIES

1. The last Prophet in these days is Noble Drew Ali, who was prepared divinely in due time by Allah to redeem men from their sinful ways; and to warn them of the great wrath which is sure to come upon the earth.

2. John the Baptist was the forerunner of Jesus in those days, to warn and stir up the nation and prepare them to receive the divine creed which was to be taught by Jesus.

3. In these modern days there came a forerunner of Jesus, who was divinely prepared by the great God-Allah and his name is Marcus Garvey, who did teach and warn the nations of the earth to prepare to meet the coming Prophet; who was to bring the true and divine Creed of Islam, and his name is Noble Drew Ali: who was prepared and sent to this earth by Allah, to teach the old time religion and the everlasting gospel to the sons of men. That every nation shall and must worship under their own vine and fig tree, and return to their own and be one with their Father God-Allah.

4. The Moorish Science Temple of America is a lawfully chartered and incorporated organization. Any subordinate Temple that desires to receive a charter; the prophet has them to issue to every state throughout the United States, etc.

5. That the world may hear and know the truth, that among the descendants of Africa there is still much wisdom to be learned in these days for the redemption of the sons of men under Love, Truth, Peace, Freedom and Justice.

6. We, as a clean and pure nation descended from the inhabitants of Africa, do not desire to amalgamate or marry into the families of the pale skin nations of Europe. Neither serve the gods of their religion, because our forefathers are the true and divine founders of the first religious creed, for the redemption and salvation of mankind on earth.

7. Therefore we are returning the Church and Christianity back to the European Nations, as it was prepared by their forefathers for their earthly salvation.

8. While we, the Moorish Americans are returning to Islam, which was founded by our forefathers for our earthly and divine salvation.
9. The covenant of the great God-Allah: “Honor they [sic] father and they [sic] mother that thy days may be longer upon the earth land, which the Lord thy God, Allah hath given thee!”

10. Come all ye Asiatics of America and hear the truth about your nationality and birthrights, because you are not negroes. Learn of your forefathers’ ancient and divine Creed. That you will learn to love instead of hate.

11. We are trying to uplift fallen humanity. Come and link yourselves with the families of nations. We honor all the true and divine prophets.


Shaikh Daoud Ahmed Faisal (d. 1980) was an African American Muslim missionary devoted to converting all Americans to what he considered to be the only true religion of humankind. This spiritual head and founder of the Islamic Mission of America successfully converted perhaps thousands of African Americans to a Sunni interpretation of Islam. His publications, which often borrowed, with acknowledgement, from other Muslim missionary tracts, sought to inform the American public on the basics of Islamic religion. His books described the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, reproduced large excerpts from the Qur’an, taught believers how to make the salat, or daily prayers, and detailed and praised contemporary Muslim heads of state. While his adventurous spirit led him to establish a short-lived Muslim village in rural New York state, he achieved his greatest success as leader of the State Street mosque in Brooklyn. As a New Yorker, Sheikh Daoud came to know Muslims who traveled to the city from various countries. In Al-Islam: The Religion of Humanity (1950), he acknowledged the assistance not only of his wife, Khadijah, but also M. A. Faridi of Iran, Bashir Ahmed Khan of Pakistan, and others from Afro-Eurasia. The sheikh was also pictured in this volume wearing light-colored Arab robes, sitting cross-legged on a prayer rug or oriental carpet. In his hands he held the Qur’an, deeply contemplating its contents in the manner of an Old World Islamic scholar. In the excerpts below, he argues that for the sake of their own salvation, Jews and Christians must convert to Islam. His criticism of Jews and Christians is grounded both in an Islamic critique of Jewish and Christian religious claims and in his experience as an African American in New York. Shaikh Daoud’s religious
“I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah”
(repeated twice).
Hayya ala-s-sala,
Hayya ala-s-sala.
“Come to prayer” (repeated twice, turning the face to the right).
Hayya ala-l-falah,
Hayya ala-l-falah.
“Come to success” (repeated twice, turning the face to the left).
Allahu Akbar,
Allahu Akbar.
“Allah is the Greatest (repeated twice).
La illaha illa-lah.
“Nothing deserves to be worshiped except Allah.”

There was more, but for now this was enough. In the weeks that followed, sitting in the small circle with Muhammad as the imam, I learned the pronunciation and the ceremonies that went with prayers. Then one day I was invited to join the brothers as a follower of the true religion of Islam. I accepted, and after a short ceremony I took the hand of brotherhood and was given the name of Hussein Afmit Ben Hassen. I learned to pray in Arabic. I learned the respect for the Holy Quran by never holding it with my left hand, which was only to cleanse myself after making ca-ca.

I learned many things, because it involved me. I became curious about everything human. Though I didn’t remain a Muslim after my eventual release from the big jail, I never forgot one thing that Muhammad said, for I believed it too: “No matter what a man’s color or race he has a need of dignity and he’ll go anywhere, become anything, or do anything to get it—anything.”

8. Elijah Muhammad, “What the Muslims Want” and “What the Muslims Believe,” from Message to the Blackman in America (1965)

The Nation of Islam’s platforms were published on a weekly basis throughout the 1960s and 1970s, often on the back page of the Muhammad Speaks newspaper. While many of Elijah Muhammad’s numerological theories, doctrines of the apocalypse, and interpretations of the Bible and the Qur’an were difficult to comprehend without study, these documents presented some of the basic teach-
ings of the Nation of Islam in an easy to understand format. Sharply dressed men wearing suits and bow ties hawked Muhammad Speaks on the streets of black America and even door to door, spreading the good news of this program to mentally resurrect the “so-called Negro” in the wilderness of North America. Whether one’s concern was religious, political, economic, or social, one of these positions was bound to be appealing. And while the Nation of Islam rejected the Christian civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr., these statements make clear that the Nation of Islam understood well the battle cry for freedom and the hope for black enfranchisement during this era of American history.

What Do the Muslims Want?

1. We want freedom. We want a full and complete freedom.
2. We want justice. Equal justice under the law. We want justice applied equally to all, regardless of creed, or class, or color.
3. We want equality of opportunity. We want equal membership in society with the best in civilized society.
4. We want our people in America whose parents or grandparents were descendants from slaves, to be allowed to establish a separate state or territory of their own . . . either on this continent or elsewhere. We believe that our former slave masters are obliged to provide such land and that the area must be fertile and mineraly rich. We believe that our former slave masters are obligated to maintain and supply our needs in this separate territory for the next 20 to 25 years . . . until we are able to produce our own needs.

Since we cannot get along with them in peace and equality, after giving them 400 years of our sweat and blood, and receiving in return some of the worst treatment human beings have ever experienced, we believe our contributions to this land and the suffering forced upon us by white America, justifies our demand for complete separation in a state or territory of our own.

5. We want freedom for all Believers of Islam now held in federal prisons. We want freedom for all black men and women now under death sentence in innumerable prisons in the North, as well as the South.

We want every black man and woman to have the freedom to accept or reject being separated from the slave-masters’ children and establish a land of their own.

We know that the above plan for the solution of the black and white conflict is the best and only answer to the problem between two people.
6. We want an immediate end to the police brutality and mob attacks against the so-called Negro throughout the United States.

We believe that the Federal government should intercede to see that black men and women tried in white courts receive justice in accordance with the laws of the land, or allow us to build a new nation for ourselves, dedicated to justice, freedom and liberty.

7. As long as we are not allowed to establish a state or territory of our own, we demand not only equal justice under the laws of the United States, but equal employment opportunities—NOW!

We do not believe that after 400 years of free or nearly free labor, sweat and blood, which has helped America become rich and powerful, that so many thousands of black people should have to subsist on relief or charity or live in poor houses.

8. We want the government of the United States to exempt our people from ALL taxation as long as we are deprived of equal justice under the laws of the land.

9. We want equal education—but separate schools up to 16 for boys and 18 for girls on the condition that the girls be sent to women's colleges and universities. We want all black children, educated, taught and trained by their own teachers.

Under such schooling systems we believe we will make a better nation of people. The United States government should provide, free, all necessary textbooks and equipment, schools, and college buildings. The Muslim teachers shall be left free to teach and train their people in the way of righteousness, decency and self respect.

10. We believe that intermarriage or race mixing should be prohibited. We want the religion of Islam taught without hindrance or suppression.

These are some of the things that we, the Muslims, want for our people in North America.

[What Do Muslims Believe?]

1. We believe in the One God Whose proper Name is Allah.
2. We believe in the Holy Qur-an and in the Scriptures of all the Prophets of God.
3. We believe in the truth of the Bible, but we believe that it has been tampered with and must be reinterpreted so that mankind will not be snared by the falsehoods that have been added to it.

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

5. We believe in the resurrection of the dead—not in the physical resurrection but in mental resurrection. We believe that the so-called Negroes are most in need of mental resurrection; therefore, they will be resurrected first.

Furthermore, we believe we are the people of God’s choice, as it has been written that God would choose the rejected and the despised. We can find no other persons fitting this description in these last days more than the so-called Negroes in America. We believe in the resurrection of the righteous.

6. We believe in the judgment. We believe this first judgment will take place in America.

7. We believe this is the time in history for the separation of the so-called Negroes and so-called white Americans. We believe the black men should be freed in name as well as in fact. By this we mean that he should be freed from the names imposed upon him by his former slave-masters. Names which identified him as being the slave of a slave-master. We believe that if we are free indeed, we should go in our own people’s names—the black people of the earth.

8. We believe in justice for all whether in God or not. We believe as others that we are due equal justice as human beings. We believe in equality—as a nation—of equals. We do not believe that we are equal with our slave master in the status of “Freed slaves.”

We recognize and respect American citizens as independent people and we respect their laws which govern this nation.

9. We believe that the offer of integration is hypocritical and is made by those who are trying to deceive the black people into believing that their 400-year-old open enemies of freedom, justice and equality are, all of a sudden, their “friends.” Furthermore, we believe that such deception is intended to prevent black people from realizing that the time in history has arrived for the separation from the whites of this nation.

If the white people are truthful about their professed friendship toward the so-called Negro, they can prove it by dividing up America with their slaves.
We do not believe that America will ever be able to furnish jobs for her own millions of unemployed, in addition to jobs for the 20,000,000 black people as well.

10. We believe that we who declared ourselves to be righteous Muslims should not participate in wars which take the lives of humans. We do not believe this nation should force us to take part in such wars, for we have nothing to gain from it unless America agrees to give us the necessary territory wherein we may have something to fight for.

11. We believe our women should be respected and protected as the women of their nationalities are respected and protected.

12. We believe that Allah (God) appeared in the Person of Master Fard Muhammad, July, 1930—the long-awaited “Messiah” of the Christians and the “Mahdi” of the Muslims.

We believe further and lastly that Allah is God and besides HIM there is no God and He will bring about a universal government of peace wherein we all can live in peace together.

9. Malcolm X, Interview with Al-Muslimoon (1965)

One of Malcolm X’s last press interviews was given to Al-Muslimoon, a journal published by the Islamic Center of Geneva, Switzerland. Responding to a written questionnaire, he completed his answers to the journal’s questions on February 20, 1965, one day before his assassination. The interview appeared in the journal first in Arabic translation and then in an English-language edition in September 1965. Malcolm had visited the Islamic Center’s director, Said Ramadan, in 1964, the year of Malcolm’s famous pilgrimage to Mecca and his training as a Muslim missionary by the World Muslim League. Ramadan, son-in-law of Muslim Brothers’ founder Hasan al-Banna, was one of several people who helped to establish the league with the support of Saudi Arabia. Like other members of the Muslim Brothers, Ramadan strongly asserted the view that Islam was both a religion and a state, the solution to all of humanity’s economic, cultural, and political problems, including the oppression of black persons in the United States. In his written questions to Malcolm X, Ramadan challenged Malcolm’s focus on black racial identity and liberation, asserting that the conversion of Americans to Islam would solve such problems. Malcolm X disagreed and insisted that while he would always be a devout Muslim, his first duty in life was to work for the political liberation of all
African Americans in the United States. The interview also explains the original mythologies of the Nation of Islam, doctrines that are considered heretical by most other Muslims in the United States and the world, and Malcolm offers what many scholars would dub a very partisan history of Elijah Muhammad’s Nation of Islam. Finally, Malcolm asks for more financial support of Muslim missionary efforts in the United States, calls for education reform and women’s uplift in the Muslim world, and criticizes Zionism, the modern movement to establish and support a Jewish national home in Palestine.

**Question:** The Black Muslim Movement is one of the most controversial movements in the United States. Having been for a considerable period its main organizer and most prominent spokesman, could you kindly give us some concise firsthand picture of the background of this movement, its history, its main ethics, and its actual strength?

**Malcolm X:** The Black Muslim movement (which calls itself officially the Lost-Found Nation of Islam) was founded in 1930 in Detroit, Michigan, by a Mr. Fard Muhammad, who claimed he had been born in Mecca, and that he had come to America for the sole purpose of teaching the supreme secrets of Islam to the Black Americans exclusively, who he said were actually the people referred to in the Old Testament of the Christian scriptures as the “lost sheep.” Elijah Muhammad was one of the first to be converted from among these “lost sheep,” and Elijah taught us to refer to him as “the first begotten,” or the “lamb of God.” Elijah also taught us that Mr. Fard was Allah in the flesh, and that this Mr. Fard (God in person) had been born in Mecca for the sole purpose of coming to America and teaching this secret supreme wisdom of Islam to the American Blacks, and by this he meant that this secret wisdom of Islam had been hidden even from the eyes and ears of the wisest and holiest men in Mecca and had been preserved specifically to be revealed by Allah himself in person to the American Blacks at the “end of time.” Elijah said that the real supreme of devils had been artificially created by a mad Black scientist [Yacub] six thousand years ago. They would rule the world for six thousand years and then be destroyed at the “end of their time” by the Blacks. He said the whites were devils by nature and the Blacks were gods, and Judgment Day means only that at the “end of time” the gods (Blacks) would destroy the entire white race (devils) and then establish a paradise (nation) on this earth ruled forever by the Blacks (gods).
Elijah taught us that Mecca was a symbol of heaven itself. He said that since whites were devils by nature they could not accept Islam, and therefore no whites could be Muslims. He taught us that Mecca was forbidden to all nonbelievers, and because [of that] whites could never enter the paradise (heaven) that would be established by the gods (Blacks) here on this earth after the destruction of the whites. He taught that “doomsday” refers to the “doom of the white race.”

Mr. Fard taught in Detroit from 1930 until 1934 and then he disappeared. It was only after Fard’s disappearance that Elijah then began teaching that Fard was Allah himself, that he had returned to heaven, but would come back again to destroy the white race and America and then would take all the American Negroes (lost sheep) who had become Muslims back to heaven (Mecca) with him, and that we would then rule the entire world from there with an iron hand. He never did teach us that we would return to Africa. He shrewdly ridiculed the culture and the features of the Africans.

From 1934 until 1952 Elijah could only gather a handful of people who would follow him, which by 1952 numbered less than four hundred, most of whom were old people whose education was limited. No Arab or Asian Muslims were ever permitted in his temples or places of worship. In fact, his doctrine is as anti-Arab and anti-Asian as it is anti-white.

Until 1963 his followers practiced iron discipline, mainly because all of us believed in the infallibility and high moral character of Elijah himself, but when his own son Wallace Muhammad exposed Elijah Muhammad as a very immoral man who had deceived and seduced seven of his young secretaries, fathering at least ten illegitimate children by them, the moral discipline of the entire movement decayed and fell apart.

From 1952 until 1963 over one million American Blacks have accepted Elijah’s distorted version of Islam. But today he has less than five thousand actual followers. Despite the fact that many have left him, no matter how disillusioned they have become even after learning the truth about his personal moral weakness and the fallacies of his doctrine, still they never return to the church, they never return to Christianity. **Question:** What were the reasons behind Elijah Muhammad being against you immediately after the assassination of Kennedy, and then behind your breakaway from the movement as a whole?
Malcolm X: Elijah Muhammad allowed himself to become insanely jealous of my own popularity, which went even beyond his own followers and into the non-Muslim community, while his own prestige and influence was limited largely among his immediate followers. While I was still in the movement and blind to his faults by my own uncompromising faith in him, I always thought the jealousy and envy which I saw constant signs of was stemming mainly and only from his immediate family, and it was quite shocking to me whenever members of his own family would warn me that it was their father (Elijah Muhammad himself) who had become almost insane with jealousy.

When Elijah learned that his son Wallace had told me how his father had seduced his teenage secretaries (by telling them that he was the prophet Muhammad, and making each of them think she was to be his favorite and most beautiful wife Aisha), Elijah feared that my position of influence in the movement was a threat to him and his other children who were now controlling the movement and benefitting from its wealth. Because they feared my popularity with the rank-and-file Muslims, they were careful about any immediate or open move to curtail my authority without good cause, so they patiently waited until they felt that my statement about the late President Kennedy’s assassination would give them the proper public support in any kind of action they’d take to curtail or remove me.

At the time they announced I was to be suspended and silenced for ninety days, they had already set in motion the machinery to have me completely ousted from the movement, and Elijah Muhammad himself had already given the order to have me killed because he feared I would expose to his followers the secret of his extreme immorality.

Question: Should these differences be of a basically ethical nature and on essential matters of faith? What, in your opinion, are the prospects of radical reform within Elijah Muhammad’s followers now or in the future?

Malcolm X: No, Elijah Muhammad himself will never change. At least I doubt it. He’s too old, dogmatic, and has already gone too far in teaching that he is a greater prophet than Muhammad Ibn Abdullah. He is too proud to confess to his followers now that he has deliberately taught them falsehood. But as his well-meaning followers become exposed to the true religion of Islam, they themselves will leave him and practice Islam as it should be. This is why it is so important for centers to be
established immediately where true Islam can be taught. And these centers should be located at this time primarily in Black communities, because at this particular time the American Blacks are the ones showing the most interest in true religion.

**QUESTION:** Have any of Elijah Muhammad’s followers left the movement with you, and do you think that your breakaway from the movement has affected its main body in any considerable way?

**MALCOLM X:** Yes, many of Elijah’s followers could not go along with his present “immorality,” and this opened their eyes to the other falsities of his doctrine. But we have not been able to regroup and reorganize them as we should. It takes finance, and we left all treasuries and properties with Elijah, and he uses this wealth that we amassed for him to fight us and keep us from getting organized. He is fanatically opposed to American Negroes hearing true Islam, and has ordered his own well-meaning followers to cripple or kill any one of his followers who wants to leave him to follow true Islam. He fears that true Islam will expose and destroy the power of his false teachings.

**QUESTION:** Do you plan to just stop at voicing your opposition against Elijah Muhammad and his group or do you have any course of action in mind towards establishing some new organization in the field? If so, on what basis and for what specific near or distant goals?

**MALCOLM X:** With what little finance we could raise, we have founded the Muslim Mosque, Inc., with headquarters here in Harlem. Our sole interest is to help undo the distorted image we have helped spread about Islam. Our mosque also is for those who want to learn how to live the life of a true Muslim.

However, since we live as Black Americans in a white racist society, we have established another organization which is non-religious, known as the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), and which is designed to unite all Black Americans regardless of their religious affiliation into a group that can fight against American racism and the economic, political, and social evils that stem from white racism here in this American society. With the Muslim Mosque we are teaching our people a better way of life, and with the OAAU we are fighting on an even broader level for complete respect and recognition as human beings for all Black Americans, and we are ready and willing to use any means necessary to see that this goal is reached.
QUESTION: What have you been actually doing since you broke away from Elijah Muhammad’s movement?
MALCOLM X: I have traveled to the Middle East and Africa twice since leaving Elijah Muhammad in March of 1964, mainly to get a better understanding of Islam and the African countries, and in turn to give the Muslim world a better understanding of problems facing those of us here in America who are trying to become Muslims. Also, in Africa to give our people there a better understanding of the problems confronting black Americans in our struggle for human rights.

QUESTION: Is it true that even after your breakaway from Elijah Muhammad you still hold the Black color as a main base and dogma for your drive under the banner of liberation in the United States? How could a man of your spirit, intellect, and worldwide outlook fail to see in Islam its main characteristic, from its earliest days, as a message that confirms beyond doubt the ethnological oneness and quality of all races, thus striking at the very root of the monstrosity of racial discrimination. Endless are the texts of the Qur’an [Koran] and prophetic sayings to this effect and nothing would testify to that more than the historic fact that heterogeneous races, nations, and linguistic entities have always mingled peacefully in the homeland.

MALCOLM X: As a Black American I do feel that my first responsibility is to my twenty-two million fellow Black Americans who suffer the same indignities because of their color as I do. I don’t believe my own personal problem is ever solved until the problem is solved for all twenty-two million of us.

Much to my dismay, until now the Muslim world has seemed to ignore the problem of the Black American, and most Muslims who come here from the Muslim world have concentrated more effort in trying to convert white Americans than Black Americans.

(Note by Malcolm X to Al-Muslimoon editors: I had arrived back in the States from London at 4:30 p.m. on February 13, and had worked until 12:30—just after midnight—on the above. I got very tired at midnight, decided to leave the above pages in the typewriter and finish early in the morning. I retired at 12:30 and exploding bombs that were thrown into my home by would-be murderers rocked me and my wife and four baby daughters from sleep at 2:30 a.m. Only Allah saved us from death. This is only one of the many examples of the extremes to which the enemies of Islam will go to see that true Islam
is never established on these shores. And they know that if I was so successful in helping to spread Elijah Muhammad’s distorted version of Islam, it is even easier for me to organize the spread of true Islam.)

There are two groups of Muslims in America: (1) those who were born in the Muslim world and migrated here, and were already Muslims when they arrived here. If these total over 200,000, they have not succeeded in converting 1,000 Americans to Islam. (2) American-born persons who have been converted to Islam are 98 percent Black Americans. Up to now it has been only the Black American who has shown interest even in Sunni Islam.

If a student of agriculture has sense enough to concentrate his farming efforts on the most fertile area of his farm, I should think the Muslim world would realize that the most fertile area for Islam in the West is the Black American. This in no way implies discrimination or racialism, but rather shows that we are intelligent enough to plant the good seed of Islam where it will grow best; later on we can “doctor up” or fertilize the less-fertile areas, but only after our crop is already well planted in the heart and mind of these Black Americans who already show great signs of receptiveness. Was it not Bilal, the Black Ethiopian, who was the first to receive the seed of Islam from the prophet himself in Arabia 1,400 years ago?

**Question:** Now that you have visited and revisited many Muslim countries, what are your major impressions regarding Islam and Muslims both in the present and in the future?

**Malcolm X:** We are standing at the threshold of the nuclear age. Education is a must, especially in this highly technical era. In my opinion, Muslim religious leaders have not stressed the importance of education to the Muslim communities, especially in African countries. Thus when African countries become independent, the non-Muslim areas have the higher degree of educated Africans who are thus the ones best qualified to occupy the newly created positions in government. Muslim religious leaders of today need a more well-rounded type of education and then they will be able to stress the importance of education to the masses, but oftentimes when these religious leaders themselves have very limited knowledge, education, and understanding sometimes they purposely keep their own people also ignorant in order to continue
their own personal position of leadership. They keep the people narrow-minded because they themselves are narrow-minded.

In every Middle East or African country I have visited, I noticed the country is as “advanced” as its women are, or as backward as its women. By this I mean, in areas where the women have been pushed into the background and kept without education, the whole area or country is just as backward, uneducated, and “underdeveloped.” Where the women are encouraged to get education and play a more active role in the all-around affairs of the community and the country, the entire people are more active, more enlightened, and more progressive. Thus, in my opinion, the Muslim religious leaders of today must reevaluate and spell out with clarity the Muslim position on education in general and education in the Muslim world. An old African proverb states: “Educate a man and you educate an individual; educate a woman and you educate an entire family.”

**Question:** Africa seems to have captured most of your attention and eager concern. Why? And now that you have visited almost every part of it, where do you think Islam actually stands? And what, in your opinion, could be done to save it from both the brainlessness of many, or rather most of those who are considered to be champions of its cause, and from the malicious, resourceful alliance of Zionism, atheism, and religious fanaticism against Islam?

**Malcolm X:** I regard Africa as my fatherland. I am primarily interested in seeing it become completely free of outside political and economic influence that has dominated and exploited it. Africa, because of its strategic position, faces a real crisis. The colonial vultures have no intention of giving it up without a fight. Their chief weapon is still “divide and conquer.” In East Africa there is a strong anti-Asian feeling being nourished among the Africans. In West Africa there is a strong anti-Arab feeling. Where there are Arabs or Asians there is a strong anti-Muslim feeling.

These hostilities are not initiated by the above-mentioned people who are involved. They have nothing to benefit from fighting among themselves at this point. Those who benefit most are the former colonial masters who have now supplanted the hated colonialism and imperialism with Zionism. The Zionists have outstripped all other interest groups in the present struggle for our mother continent. They use such
a benevolent, philanthropic approach that it is quite difficult for their victims to see through their schemes. Zionism is even more dangerous than communism because it is made more acceptable and is thus more destructively effective.

Since the Arab image is almost inseparable from the image of Islam, the Arab world has a multiple responsibility that it must live up to. Since Islam is a religion of brotherhood and unity, those who take the lead in expounding this religion are duty-bound to set the highest example of brotherhood and unity. It is imperative that Cairo and Mecca (the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs and the Muslim World League) have a religious “summit” conference and show a greater degree of concern and responsibility for the present plight of the Muslim world, or other forces will rise up in this present generation of young, forward-thinking Muslims and the “power centers” will be taken from the hands of those that they are now in and placed elsewhere. *Allah can easily do this.*
oppose us, and to those who have no peace of mind. We must teach them these qualities, give them this food, this beauty, and this nourishment of grace and absolute faith. Every human being in the community of Islam, everyone who has faith, all those who are learned and wise, all the leaders of prayer and the teachers, all those who know the Qur’an—all must understand this. This is what I ask of you.

Amen. Allah is sufficient unto us all.

2. W. D. Mohammed, “Historic Atlanta Address” (1978)

Born Wallace Delaney Muhammad to parents Elijah and Clara in 1933, W. D. Mohammed grew up a member of the Messenger Elijah Muhammad’s “royal family.” From the 1950s through the 1970s, Mohammed served on and off as a minister in his father’s Nation of Islam, but he drifted in and out of favor as he questioned the Islamic legitimacy of his father’s teachings. Even so, when Elijah Muhammad died in 1975, this prodigal son emerged as the movement’s leader. He radically altered the official religious doctrines of the Nation of Islam, instructing members to observe the traditional five pillars of Islamic practice. During this period, perhaps W. D. Mohammed led more African Americans toward Sunni Islam than any other person in history, before or after. He became known as mujaddid, or a renewer of religion; later, he would encourage his followers simply to call him “Imam Mohammed.” As the Imam led his followers toward Sunni Islam and away from his father’s black religious separatism, he also insisted that African American Muslims continue to work for improvement in the quality of black life, to take pride in their ethnic heritage, and to interpret Sunni Islam in light of African American historical circumstances. He also initiated dialogues with Jews and Christians, especially under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Focolare movement, and he built strong ties to other Muslim leaders both in the United States and abroad. In 1992, he became the first Muslim to offer the opening prayer before a session of the U.S. Senate. In this excerpt from a 1978 address to followers in Atlanta, Imam Wallace Deen, as he was also known, outlines some of the principles that he consistently followed in leading his community of Sunni African American Muslims in the last quarter of the twentieth century. He condemns immorality, reminds his believers about proper rules of Islamic etiquette, and reaffirms his commitment to perennial themes of black uplift. In so doing, Imam Mohammed appeals to the imams
of his various communities, asking for their loyalty and their submission to the God of Abraham, the God of Muslims, Christians, and Jews.

All praise is due to Almighty God, the guardian evolver and sustainer of all the worlds. The blessings and peace be upon Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah to us all.

O Allah, guide us, forgive us our faults, and grant us the blessing of faith. I bear witness there is no deity except Allah and I bear witness Muhammad is His Servant and His Messenger. Peace be upon him, his descendants, his companions, the righteous servants, all of them, and upon us in America and throughout the world:

I shouldn’t have to ask anybody to propagate the work and spirit of our community. Once I say something, it should be readily accepted by every member. If it’s not readily accepted, I should get a quick rebuttal. That’s how we progress.

If the leader invites you to do something or asks something from you and you feel it is not right, challenge him right away. But, if it is right, if it is good, and in the light of the Quran and in the life of Prophet Muhammad and in the conscience of good people of the society, what right have you to hesitate?

Right away you should support it!

I’ve been a follower since I was a little child. In fact, I’ve never known a time when I wasn’t a follower. The environment that I came up in produced followers.

I was a follower of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad; I was a follower of the teacher, and principal, the one who taught me most of what I learned in elementary and high school, Sheikh James Abdul Aziz Shabazz.

I was a follower of Captain Raymond Sharif and the captain before him. I followed the leaders and even when they were wrong, I didn’t disrespect them. I just didn’t follow them in the wrong.

When they became so wrong that I thought they weren’t qualified to be leaders, I began to protest. This is the way!

Some people don’t want to be followers. They want to be individuals without following anything. That’s not a Muslim.

Allah tells us to obey God, obey His apostle and obey those charged with authority over you. We should love leadership. Leadership is the hope of a civilized people. Without leadership they have no hope.
Our priorities haven’t changed and if you go along with me they will never change until Judgment Day.

Number one, is education. Number two, is jobs for the husbands and the fathers. Not for the pimps, for husbands and fathers. For men who still value the family and want to marry and have children. These are the people we want to see with jobs because they have more responsibility. Number three, is moral excellence.

If we just keep these three priorities in mind—education, jobs for the husbands and fathers and moral excellence. We shouldn’t tolerate any moral diseases in our community. If we find a moral disease, get to work on it right away. Under these priorities, we have many things going for us.

I’m very proud of the leadership that I’ve given to you, and I know that without God, it couldn’t have been done. You couldn’t have given me the support I needed and I couldn’t have given you the faith you needed because I would only have been a weakling.

I’m not an educated man with a doctorate or a master’s degree, not even a bachelor’s degree. I received most of my education in the schools established by Dr. Fard Muhammad and made a reality for us by the Honorable Elijah Muhammad.

The school was hardly recognized by the Board of Education but they sure turned out a pretty good high school product in me.

I wanted to find out just how I rated with the public school so I took the GED test and rated high nationwide.

We must get the Imams, not some of you, all of you, to support and promote American patriotism—sober, intelligent patriotism, and also to support our call for the common people to respect and work to dutifully preserve the government.

Recent developments have been turning the people away from civilization and government to anarchy, savagery and orgiastic forms of life.

Thanks to Almighty God, with a President like Jimmy Carter and the support he’s getting from the members of his staff and the good people in government throughout the United States, and with the voice of one in the ghetto as one in the wilderness saying, “come back to civilization, come back to respect for human dignity,” we have turned the tide of moral decadence, savagery, filth and vulgar permissiveness.

We have turned around. There is a new spirit in America today. The sun is rising on the human being and going down on the brute and the filthy savage.
Our Imams must support our movement for interfaith cooperation to create a common religious front to fight the evils of our society.

The people of the Torah, the Gospel and the Quran are a family from one common patriarch, Abraham, who is called “our father” in Judaism, in Christianity and in Al-Islam. And, we are called people of the Book.

I think we can all unite on those strong points and fight the common enemies.

Religion won’t survive unless we come together. We need help. As the majority of people today are leaving the strong, healthy, good things that civilization has established, don’t you know we will all be run over and trampled under the feet of those wild animals unless we unite and preserve all that we cherish?

We can’t look at each other as Christians or Jews, we have to look at each other as people believing in One God.

“Oh, Chief [Minister], they don’t believe in our God.” Well, I can prove something quite different, dear Sister and Brother.

Our Imam Council has to accept the responsibility of promoting and preserving the religion of Al-Islam for the World Community of al-Islam in the West [the reformed version of the Nation of Islam]. They have to preserve the Islamic spirit of this community.

We should say, “As-Salaam-Alaikum,” “Wa-Alaikum-As-Salaam.” We shouldn’t pass by and ignore each other. We shouldn’t come in on a group of Muslims and say nothing or walk away from a group of Muslims and say nothing, even from one Muslim. Give the greeting when you come in or leave.

The rule is the smaller group is to speak to the larger group. They are obligated to greet the larger group and the one who comes in later is obligated to greet those who are already in. Most of us love this, it’s just a few having the problem.

The Imams have to be pledged to work for the human dignity of the individual. Your Brother and your Sister are our equals in Al-Islam. There are no class distinctions, no respect for your degrees or your muscles. The only recognition in Al-Islam is for your being a decent human being—that’s what we respect.

In the eyes of God, he who is best is the one most careful of his duty to the Almighty.

The majority of our Imams have no problem. Those of you yet to come around, we are begging you, Brother—we need you and you need us.
I’ve done my best to foster in us a spirit of healthy, sober, intelligent patriotism as Americans, and a healthy, intelligent attitude toward human dignity over the past three and one half years, and I hope none of you will let me down.

Let us have a Patriotism Day Parade every year. Let us show all American people we were brought here as slaves and treated like work animals or worse. We were invited to come into the mainstream of American life and the law of the land rose up and said, “We will protect the black, the African-American just as we protect any other citizen.”

We accepted it and we’re proud of it and we’ll hold the American Flag high, we’ll fight for it, we’ll die for it. We’re not going to put our burden on another citizen; I accept the burden. I accept the responsibility.

As religious people, as Muslims, we have to be of service to all peoples. We can’t just serve Muslims, we have to serve all peoples.

When we walk out of our door we see people; all were created by the same God, and whatever God has revealed for one He has revealed for all.

If they are not Muslim now, that’s God, He’s the judge of that. Almighty God says that you will be differing even up to Judgment Day. But at the same time, He says you go you all together as in a race toward all that is good.

Not only Muslim with Muslim, but Muslim with Jew, Muslim with Christian. Let us all go together.

Allah is the prefect being. Allah is all righteous, truthful—no imperfections in Allah. Allah is Supreme and Perfect without any imperfections.


Peace be to you
Your brother in service to Allah
Wallace Deen Muhammad


For the most part, the religious teachings of the Nation of Gods and Earths, or the Five Percenters, do not utilize the Qur’an and the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad of Arabia as sources of wisdom and guidance. The numerological and linguistic theories of the Five Percenters instead recall the traditions of