

SEARCHING FOR AN IDENTITY IN THIS WILDERNESS: A COMPARATIVE HISTORY
OF BLACK COUNTER-IDENTITY MOVEMENTS IN TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICA

A Thesis by

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in history.

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Any time you beg another man to set you free,
you will never be free. Freedom is something that you
have to do for yourselves.

-Malcolm X

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines three African American counter identity organizations that contributed distinct responses to the overt displays of White racism during the early twentieth century. Moreover, this thesis explores the historical context of African American identity and how it may influence the social movements of modern day. By utilizing comparative analysis as a tool to cross examine the Moorish Science Temple of America, the UNIA, and the Nation of Islam, considering their successes, failures, organizational structures, and message to Blacks of the inter-war period, this thesis concludes that there are two essential takeaways when considering these groups' responses. First, the issue of Black identity was as relevant in early twentieth century America as it is in modern day. Second, these groups distinct responses to White racism during their time, paired with the manner in which they dealt with the issue of Black identity, not only contributes greatly to historiography; but may also serve as an important historical case study to the modern day Black social movements that are currently responding to the ongoing issue of White racism.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/NOMENCLATURE

MSTA	Moorish Science Temple of America
UNIA	Universal Negro Improvement Association
NOI	Nation of Islam
FOI	Fruit of Islam
AME	African Methodist Episcopal Church

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

African American identity has been a complex topic for many historians and activists for several generations. Is there a modern-day Black identity that is universally recognized in America? More importantly, are today's social movements promoting the proper image of a perceived identity? Questions such as these are being asked in modern day scholarship and social mediums revealing the daunting fact that Black identity is currently in flux, highly questionable, and largely unrecognized in American society. Because of today's social movements such as Black Lives Matter and others, the ever-complex question of Black identity is once again being addressed and researched by many scholars and activists. This apparent resurgence of Black identity consciousness in today's social climate is a clear response to the overt displays of racism being inflicted upon the group. Today's response aims to address these overt atrocities, so that action may be taken to ensure African Americans are treated fairly within the larger society. Unfortunately, this response is not entirely unique to the group's current dilemma. In fact, there are various historical examples of Black responses to White racism that still maintain relevancy. A great tool to accurately examine the current dilemma associated with Black identity is a rigorous study of the past.

By actively examining the infrastructures of past Black identity movements, considering their responses and successes, the historian, student, or lay activist may possibly gain the essential ingredient needed to address the complex dilemma that is evident today. Moreover, as added value, an in-depth examination of Black counter identity movements may serve as not only a crucial source of historical veracity providing an interesting perspective in reacting to the current climate; but may also serve as the best attempt that Blacks have had at addressing the

issue of identity thus far. Furthermore, the Black counter-identity movements that were formed in twentieth century America, especially during the inter-war periods represent some of the most inviolable responses to the issue of identity for the group and may serve as vital references for addressing the problem of identity. For the purpose of this examination the three social and or counter-identity movements that will be covered, and compared, are: The Moorish Science Temple of America created and led by Timothy Drew, better known as Noble Drew Ali; The Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League, or UNIA/ACL, created and led by political figure Marcus Garvey; and finally, The Nation of Islam, or NOI, led by the honorable Elijah Muhammad, and later by minister Louis Farrakhan. Mentioned earlier, the examination of these pivotal movements will illuminate how the lingering question of Black identity was as relevant during early twentieth century America as it is today, as well as how these counter-identity movements dealt with its complex reality.

Throughout this examination the term Negro, Black, and African American will be used somewhat interchangeably depending on what period is being examined at the time, coordinating with the historically correct verbiage. Additionally, other organizations and movements will be examined, apart from the three mentioned above, that were directly involved or contributed greatly to the formation and experiences of the three primaries being examined. Furthermore, many acronyms and abbreviations will be presented in this examination that played a significant role in the Black counter-identity movement. These abbreviations and acronyms will be explained and fully spelled out so their meanings may not confuse the reader or future researcher. Also, this examination will begin with briefly touching on the Reconstruction era in an attempt to merely establish and make clear the pre-conditions in which these movements were birthed. There will be many preconditions that will be covered in this examination, but the

Reconstruction period will serve as the first and singly most important mainly due to the brutality and social exclusion that many Blacks experienced that motivated them to flee and form the three movements being covered. It is also imperative to discuss the importance that this examination has on myself as the author.

To be clear about the three groups that will be covered in this examination, all but one has a religious purpose at the core of their ideology. Although, Garvey's organization became closely aligned with the African Methodist Episcopal Church, his basic doctrine and organizational relevance was not based off divinity, but rather self-dedication and a strong economic sense. Furthermore, the Moorish Science Temple of America, and the Nation of Islam were and remain unorthodox Muslim sects. Incorporating specific teachings and lessons from orthodox Islam, while creating their own in an attempt to appeal to the Black masses of the twentieth century, these two groups have recruited many who chose to join their cause. Of the many who have joined the movements my father, and two uncles are members of both organizations. My father, Eddie Nelson Sr. is a member of the Moorish Science Temple of America, and his two brothers Omar and Christopher Williams are members of the Nation of Islam, subsequently changing their last name to the letter X. These three men chose to join the movements at crucial times in their lives and have since professed that they have made the best decision of their lives. Being one of the few Black males to be raised by a father, I grew up learning about these two movements in great detail. Although, my father joined the MSTTA later in his life, he studied the organization vigorously while raising his other six children and myself. It is in large part due to this, as well as my uncles joining the Nation of Islam at a fairly young age, that I am a devout orthodox Muslim and have the great interest to study these groups more closely. I did not join the two groups mainly because I chose to attend traditional educational

institutions beyond high school and became an orthodox Muslim after earning my undergraduate degree. However, my interest in these groups, including the UNIA, and their contributions to the African American experience has heightened the more I came to understand my faith whilst continuing my education. Stated plainly, this thesis project is not simply a requirement for my master's degree. It serves as a passion project because I have family members that are members of the Moorish Science Temple and Nation of Islam. Moreover, it is crucial to acknowledge these organizations' contribution to the African American historiography, in regard to identity. Finally, this thesis seeks to expand upon the extensive historiography related to African American identity.

1.1 Literature Overview: Addressing the Identity Crisis

As discussed earlier, this thesis examines African American identity. The main component of this argument is that although the state of Black identity in current day seems to be in great flux, clarity may lie in the infrastructures of twentieth century inter-war counter-identity movements. This contemporary flux that will be expanded on in greater detail in the thesis. However, as a brief synopsis, I contest that this flux exists mainly because of the recent displays of overt carelessness for Black lives in current day America by the White majority. Furthermore, it is because of these displays that social movements are beginning to form in an attempt to establish a more unified and recognized response for the Black identity, which demands respect and recognition for the entire group. For this reason, I believe that it is imperative for today's scholars and lay activists to thoroughly examine some of the social movements of the past to use as a sort of organizational outline. The three social movements of the inter-war periods, MSTA, UNIA, and NOI, are the most distinct attempts at addressing the issue of identity for African Americans because of their success and infrastructures that rendered the best results for the

group during their height. The NOI and MSTA are still currently active but were much more effective during the inter-war periods when they were so desperately needed by Black communities, and violence towards the group was frequent. Similarly, the same can be said for current social groups such as Black Lives Matter, which represents the largest and most well-known. What separates the two periods' movements however is the existence of an infrastructure.

Black Lives Matters has been on the front lines in current day protesting and demanding justice for every police shooting, display of systematic racism, and every overt racist act that seems to be caught on camera, and their efforts are recognized and vital for the group. However, what the movement, and many other smaller organizations, fail to create is a path forward that will benefit the African American group in the future. Exposing the atrocities that Blacks face on a daily basis attracts attention and gains support, but there must be an infrastructure set up for the group to recover from these incidents and learn to be self-sufficient in their own communities, to further their opportunities and extend their lifespan. This is where the thorough examination of the Moorish Science Temple, the Universal Negro Improvement Association and the Nation of Islam becomes crucial. Although, the organizations that will be covered in this examination represent counter-identity movements, therefore denying any involvement or connection to the Blacks in America, their responses to White racism still represent the best attempt at addressing the issue of identity mainly due to their contribution and influences that they left on later social movements; and therefore, maintain great relevancy for today's dilemma. To be clear, these three movements attracted and recruited only a small percentage of the Black population in early twentieth century. However, as my main argument suggests their responses to White racism during this period is extremely relevant for today's social climate and may serve as some of the

most distinct attempts at addressing the issue of identity for the group. This thesis will utilize available sources that outline these groups' infrastructures, ideology, and even addresses the idea of a group identity expressed by these organizations.

One of the more vital sources that provides a comprehensive history of Black counter-identity movements during the early-twentieth century is the Ph.D. dissertation of activist and anthropologist Arthur Huff Fauset later published as *Black Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North*. This source is key to this examination mainly because it is one of the first comprehensive works written on the Black counter-identity movements that were forming in the 1930s and 1940s. Published in 1944 Fauset provides firsthand descriptions of counter-identity movements, which he labels as cults and orthodox evangelical churches during this time. In this work, Fauset profiles and extensively examines five Black religious sects of Philadelphia, where he was a long-time resident and educator. The five groups that Fauset chose as case studies were: Mt. Sinai Holy Church of America Inc, which was a Christian holiness church founded by Bishop Ida Robinson; United House of Prayer for all People, which was a bible-based sect led by Daddy Grace; Church of God, a group of self-proclaimed Black Jews who taught that White Jews were imposters and that Jesus was a Black man; Moorish Science Temple of America, founded by Noble Drew Ali; and lastly the Father Divine Peace Mission Movement, an racially egalitarian and communitarian group.¹ By cross examining these groups Fauset contributes the first work to the African American historiography that showcases counter-identity groups. He spends the first half of this work discussing the general infrastructure of these groups and their religious ideologies. Being that his work is primarily grounded in oral

¹ Arthur H. Fauset, *Black Gods of The Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1944), ix.

interviews from the group's members, and visits to their religious services, Fauset's work combines strategies of ethnographic, sociological, comparative, and anthropological patterns to render results that displays the five groups from an objective, non-judgmental perspective.

The goal of my thesis is somewhat an extension of Fauset's work whilst utilizing a more comparative analysis. It is also worth mentioning that Fauset dedicates the second half of his work to extensively describing the recruiting techniques, and the allure that these five organizations had on the Blacks of Philadelphia. This component will also serve as a contributing factor in my examination on a broader scale. Where Fauset focuses on these five organizations in the confines of Philadelphia, he chooses to present a proper source of Black micro-social history. This method is imperative to the examination because it allows for me, and other interested scholars, to observe his techniques and apply them to our own additions to the historiography. This first comprehensive source of Black counter-identity movements serves as an excellent beginning outline for what my examination will entail. Fauset created a work that is unique in form and pivotal for the larger discussion of social and or counter-identity movements that has inspired many works that have succeeded it.

Another vital source that contributes greatly to the Black counter-identity historiography is *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America* written by E.U. Essien-Udom. This work is possibly the most crucial source to the historiography mainly because it builds so drastically off Fauset's work. Originally published in 1962, Essien-Udom addresses the issue of Negro identity during this period and focuses primarily on the Nation of Islam of Chicago as a case study. Essien-Udom concludes that because of social exclusion and rejection, paired with the lasting heritage of the slavery, Blacks of the 1960s faced, a dilemma. Moreover, Essien-Udom professes that by denying Blacks social inclusivity and favoring assimilation, society

removes every sense of creativity, folk culture, and uniqueness that the group ever possessed. This process inevitably produced Black nationalism. Essien-Udom's aim in this work is to showcase this Black nationalism in the form of its organizations that were created from this process. As mentioned, focusing primarily on the Nation of Islam Muslims Essien-Udom extensively examines the group's leader Elijah Muhammad, its programs, and behaviors. Additionally, in this work Essien-Udom also examines Marcus Garvey's UNIA, Noble Drew Ali's Moors, and many other organizations that were prominent in the counter-identity movement during the early twentieth century.² In dealing with this dilemma, the author creates one of the most important comprehensive works on the counter-identity movement, as well as directly inspired the examination of the selected organizations that will be examined in this thesis. This work is crucial to the historiography simply because of its argument and execution of its main themes. Essien-Udom may have presented groups and organizations that were unknown to many of his readers, but he explained their structures and the social dilemma that helped create them in such a way that it was easily digestible and relatable to any audience.

Furthermore, after his presentation of the Negro dilemma he divides each chapter systematically explaining every aspect of the Nation of Islam including: the Muslim's rise, organizational structure, recruitment tactics, religious rituals and ceremonies, educational tools, prolific speakers, and the trends that seem to form because of this group. While presenting this information Essien-Udom makes various observations that contribute greatly to the overall historiography. It was his observation of the White majority's efforts to restrict Blacks advancement in the social hierarchy that was especially interesting. According to Essien-Udom,

² E.U. Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962), vii-viii.

this is one of the main reasons why they were so anxious to manufacture their own identity separate from the struggle of African Americans. Essien-Udom's argument and evidence was presented rationally, without bias or overt judgement toward the groups. Also, with the current state of African Americans this work really covered some of the main frustrations and dilemmas that are still present. This work, along with the others that will be mentioned, prompted me to examine more closely the role of Black identity and its history. Although, Essien-Udom mentions MSTA and UNIA more briefly than the NOI I believe that all three groups and their history have crucial roles in the history of Black identity. Also, it is important to mention that Essien-Udom realized and makes clear that these groups, especially the NOI, did not wish to be aligned or categorized with other Blacks in America. Instead, as mentioned previously, they chose to create their own anthropological past and even separate ethnic group. This is the unique quality and great irony to why these groups were vital to the concept of Black identity and may be used as a potential road map to the current dilemma in the United States.

Another pivotal source that contributes greatly to the Black counter-identity historiography is *Islam in the African American Experience* written by Richard Brent Turner. This more recent work, published in 2003, explores the Black Muslim movement in America in an in-depth manner. The work focuses largely on the Black Muslim sects of MSTA and NOI, with Turner claiming that he is filling the gap that was present in Essien-Udom, and Fauset's works. Turner focuses on the concept of African American Islam from a very broad perspective. In doing so, he mainly examines the religious aspects of Islam and the significant role it has played in the African American experience since their arrival to the country, up until the twenty-first century. The role of signification is heavily emphasized in this work. In fact, it is signification, as Turner suggests, that produces the process of assigning names and new identities

to African Americans through Islam, signifying themselves as the people they wanted to be. Thus, the change of their American identity signified a radical change in political, cultural, and religious identity.³ These changes were therefore seen as a positive, it was deemed an intellectual resistance to the systematic racism that has plagued African Americans. Although this concept of separatism and or intellectual resistance is similar to the previous works of the historiography, Turner examines this role of Islam from a more religious philanthropic lens to provide a more concise view on how Black Muslims organizations modified orthodox Islam to essentially declare themselves separate from the American society.

Turner's work is drastically distinct from that of Fauset and Essien-Udom mainly because his work is an examination of the extensive role of Islam in America, through Black organizations, from a religious standpoint. The main tenets of Islam are thoroughly covered in this work and how it related to its African American participants. Turner brilliantly divides his work into two parts where he expertly dissects the religion of Islam so that the reader may gain a better historical understanding so that it may assist them throughout the remainder of the extended reading. The first part of this work indirectly compares the structures, themes, and history between twentieth-century African American Islam with that of the global Islam in the Middle East, West Africa, and even antebellum America. This portion of the work is essential for the reader because not only does it organize the concepts, aspects, and many themes of orthodox and African American Islam, it introduces some of the lesser-known Muslim movements in the United States, as well as the study and practice of Pan-Africanism; briefly mentioning Marcus Garvey. Also, it seeks to dispel any stereotypes that many American readers may possess about

³ Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African American Experience* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 4.

Islam from a religious perspective. Part two introduced and extensively covered the Black Islamic groups that will be covered in my examination. Turner strategically cross-examines MSTA, NOI and their polarizing leaders and figures Fard Muhammad, Elijah Muhamad, Malcolm X, and Noble Drew Ali. This part is intricate and imperative to the organizations' perspective of identity because it showcases each organization's ideology and reinterprets the global themes of African American Islam in the context of the Pan-Africanist impulse in twentieth-century Black America.

One of the more interesting and unique components of this work that sets it apart from the previous historiographical works mentioned, besides its examination of African Islam pre-Atlantic slave trade, is the exploration of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam that was present in late nineteenth-century America. This was one of the more interesting aspects of the work mainly because Turner makes clear that this missionary group from India, which served as the model for heterodoxy and continuous prophecy may have been the movement in which the African American Islam groups were based. However, this movement incorporated a model for a multi-racial community experience. Although, this group may be presented as a bridge between MSTA and NOI, there is a tension that existed with Ahmadiyya's ideology of a multi-racial community experience, and NOI leader Minister Louis Farrakhan who represent racial separatism. This tension has been present since the 1920s. This aspect is an important addition to Turner's work because it displays some tension as well as early influences of Black Islam during the Reconstruction period that impacted the several waves of the Great Migration.

The final source that is vital to the African American identity historiography and is directly responsible for the examination that will follow is *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* written by Michael A. Gomez. This work is a critical

source that brilliantly wraps up this historiography mainly because it provides one of the last comprehensive examination of the twentieth century. More broadly speaking, this work published in 2005, showcases what I attempt to accomplish with my examination of the three counter-identity movements. Gomez focuses specifically on the religion of Islam including its growth and lifespan in the United States. Similar to Turner's examination in many ways, Gomez offers a refreshing perspective with his inclusion of Islam's role in the African diaspora that features various cultures and regions. Simply stated, Gomez dedicates the first portion of his work to displaying how the African Muslim communities that were distributed throughout early Brazil, Latin America, and the Caribbean may have been more organized than the earlier communities of the United States.

This perspective is especially interesting because Gomez explains how Islam as an African importation failed in these secondary regions but emerged as an important social and political force for Black Muslims in the United States. He explains the reason for this failure was in large part due to the Muslims in these areas, Brazil, Latin America, and the Caribbean, were largely visible, and threatening, which inevitably attracted unwanted attention from government sectors. The Muslim communities in these communities, according to Gomez, experienced severe political suppression. In contrast, the Muslim communities in the United States were quiet and compliant experiencing minor political success without attracting any negative attention from the state; until the early twentieth century when Islam leaders became a catalyst for Black nationalist movements.⁴ This section is the basis of Gomez's argument which is the definitive

⁴ Michael Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), x.

study of African American Islam and its various communities and how their principals and structures contribute to their complex texture.

To further expand on this argument, Gomez examines Islam's development in the United States and why it was so drastically different from that of the earlier mentioned regions, and how it has progressed and continues to exist with a more conventional approach. To accomplish this task Gomez strategically displays how the African American Muslim movements, particularly the NOI and MSTA forged more nationalist expressions in which Islamic ideas could be introduced and disseminated. Furthermore, he explains how this brand of unorthodox Islam had reached its peak popularity with figures such as Noble Drew Ali and especially Malcolm X, whose eventual embrace of orthodoxy in the form of Sunni Islam may have paved the way for many others, including myself, to follow. Moreover, Gomez's final argument in this work, after his extensive comparative analysis of Muslim communities such as the NOI and MSTA, simply expresses how this closure of the unorthodox Islam created in the early twentieth century and reattachment to the form of Islam that more closely resembled the religions of African forebears owes much to the pioneers of theologies at variance with the conventional. Acknowledgement of these counter-identity movements, and their relation to the founding Islamic movements in the United States is one of the prime motivators for the examination that follows. Gomez's perspective and examination shines light on a new field of study and intellectual thought. Discussing how these unorthodox Islamic movements inspired Blacks to accept Islam makes a unique contribution to the field of Black social history.

My goal in conducting this research is to simply expand upon the ideas presented in works that came before mine. Arthur Fauset, E.U. Essien-Udom, Richard B. Turner, and Michael Gomez's works have all contributed greatly to the Black counter-identity historiography and

deserve all the accolades that they have received thus far. However, my work will serve as a more vital source to the current climate of African American social history and the group's present dilemma of identity. These sources provide an excellent template for me to expand on the historiography and showcase more responses to the current problem. The historians that have published these works have not placed the UNIA organization on the proper stage as an influential counter-identity that contributed greatly to the historiography. Marcus Garvey's separatist and nationalist stance as a response to White racism is the reason for its coverage in the following examination.

The authors of the works above simply glossed over the works and accomplishments of Marcus Garvey, while acknowledging only the existence of his movement. The unique contribution that my examination will offer is not only an in-depth explanation of the NOI and MSTA as the works mentioned above have already done, but I will present the accomplishments and structure of Garvey's organization and how it may be used as a possible template for social movements in current day. Furthermore, the three movements that will be examined and compared may all serve as proper templates for a current social movement and deserve to be examined from a historical standpoint, despite the fact that they were examples of counter-identity organizations. This comparative method of examination is the necessary tool to showcase each organization's successes and more apparent failures to properly provide a conclusive view on how they dealt with the issue of Black identity. The irony of these Black counter-identity movements possibly serving as relevant sources to current social movements is apparent and will be expanded on later on in this thesis. In fact, this irony serves as one of the thesis problems that will be addressed in the next section as I further explain my main argument.

1.2 Thesis Problem

The primary historical problem that this thesis seeks to address is the issue of African American identity. More specifically, the status of the group's identity in current day society. I argue that the status of African Americans and their present-day identity is in a stage of instability and must be addressed. In order to address this issue, an in-depth examination of previous responses to the Black identity crisis will undoubtedly offer historical precedents that current social movements may possibly imitate to achieve their desired objective.

The social movements that exist in current day whose aim is to properly improve the status of African American identity on an expeditious timeline, have unknown objectives. Of course, social movements such as the Black Lives Matters organization, the most popular, have a clear aim to put an end of systemic racism and police brutality inflicted on African Americans, so that Blacks may be treated fairly within their society. This aim is honorable and necessary for the advancement of the African American group. However, what will be the next step? Once Blacks have ended the overt displays of systemic racism and police brutality how will they ensure they are treated fairly within the larger society? How will they ensure the police officers that patrol Black neighborhoods won't repeat past atrocities? These are the few questions and lingering problems that exist with the social movements of current day and with the constant role of social media, many overnight movements have short life spans, quickly fleeing from the mind of band wagon activists who seek to join a cause as long as it maintains a large internet following. Many popular Black social movements of current day lack a solution that will propel the race forward or at least to some societal fairness. This is a rather grand task to accomplish and the responses to the identity issue today are achieving many feats.

The overall objective in examining these three movements is to fulfill two tasks. Firstly, I intend to recount how the MSTA, UNIA, and the NOI addressed the issue of identity in the past.

This objective will not only showcase how these groups responded to White racism, but it will surely display how the issue of Black identity remains greatly relevant in today's charged society. Secondly, I intend to provide in-depth detail on these organizations' structures and recruiting tactics for any reader who is considering an alternative mindset to Americanism. Mentioned previously, these groups did not obtain mass amounts of African American recruits in their heyday nor today. However, for the segment of African Americans in modern day who want to gain a better understanding of these counter-identity movements, this will be a great source to review. This is not the main aim of the thesis it is merely a potential objective for the curious reader. As the examination will showcase, the three counter-identity movements attempted to provide recruited Blacks independent political, economic, social, and even educational systems that benefited those who chose to join their causes. These were merely the movements' responses to the issue of identity of the early twentieth century.

This separatist, and or Black nationalist, stance was not the most popular tactic in American society, but it does represent a distinct response to a racially charged environment. However, similar to early twentieth century Blacks, today's population merely desires to be treated fairly as Americans. Reviewing these organizations' responses to the issue of identity may inspire the future activist to further the conversation and began a chain reaction of fairness for African Americans. It is unreasonable to trust that these three organizations serve as the solution to the issue of Black identity that exist in today's society. These organizations and their ideologies have and will always have an audience. However, they are not the single most important organizations that will solve the Black identity crisis. Again, this thesis aim is to merely recount the organizations' distinct responses to White racism, and how they dealt with

the issue of identity. As a historian this is the objective, and the internal desire is that it may further the Black identity conversation.

1.3 Methods

To properly present the counter-identity movements of the early twentieth century recognized as the Moorish Science Temple of America, or MSTA, the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League, or UNIA, and the Nation of Islam, or NOI; an in-depth comparative examination must be performed to accurately reveal these movement's structural successes. Furthermore, through the effective tool of comparative examination the contributions made by these organizations to the African American experience will be displayed, as well as their historical significance. Moreover, the ironic position that these movements placed themselves in, which existed because they declared themselves separatists and or nationalists, will be showcased and extensively explained as this method of examination will prove unbiased in its conclusions. Additionally, the current status of these organizations will be examined paired with the explanation of which one has been more successful in their objectives. This will serve as one of the more interesting components in this examination which shall be a continuing question in the minds of the reader as the examination progresses. As it will come apparent in the later chapters of this work, the status of all three organizations have fallen from popularity and replaced by the social movements of current day. The reason for this fall from grace, as it were, may be due to a multitude of contributing factors. Certainly, government interference and internal strife occupy the more dominant roles for decline. However, the mere fact that the vast majority of African Americans post-early twentieth century attempted to attain the American dream, may be the prime reason for these organizations' small audience and limited influence in current day.

The examination will not begin with a comparative method. Instead, it will display the many preconditions that motivated the formation for these three organizations and their eventual responses. The Reconstruction period will signify the beginning of the examination because it was during this vital interval where the African American identity began to be manufactured and greatly challenged. Many organizations and movements were formed during this period to aid in the recently freed Blacks transition to citizenship. As it will become apparent in this section of the examination, the many groups failed, and Southern Blacks were subjected to treatment similar to the chattel slavery that they were recently freed from. It is because of this reversion to an oppressive society, and other economic reasons, why many Blacks fled the rural areas of the Southern states and settled into the urban areas of the Northern cities. Thus, bringing about the period of the Great Migration, which is when these three movements were formed and popularized. These preconditions are vital to the examination of these counter-identity movements and must be examined first to showcase a more vigorous commitment to the historiography and its significance. Once these preconditions are examined the first movement, MSTA, will be displayed in terms of its organizational structure, leader, ideologies, and historical significance. The other two movements will follow this pattern followed by a comparative examination to showcase their potential influence on modern identity movements.

CHAPTER 2

BLACK IDENTITY DURING THE RECONSTRUCTION PERIOD

The Civil War and the period that directly followed it drastically altered every aspect of American life. Not only did the nation experience social and economic changes that arose from the emancipation of four million slaves; but White continued to control newly freed African Americans.⁵ The Reconstruction era was an interval of American history where Black identity was manufactured by various organizations and greatly challenged by Southern Whites. The ramifications of governmental neglect of Blacks in the Southern states during the Reconstruction period not only set the stage for decades of White rule that would follow, but it also led to one of the most significant responses to White racism, the Great Migration.

The original intent for Reconstruction in the post-Civil South was to benefit the former Confederate states as well as the recently emancipated slaves. These two agendas were met with opposition from Congress and especially from the Southern born Democrat, and recently appointed seventeenth U.S. President Andrew Johnson. The year 1865 not only signified the end of the American Civil War, April 9th, but it also witnessed the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln just six days later. In 1863, President Lincoln outlined to Congress his comprehensive agenda for Reconstruction, which was issued with a proclamation that contained its essential features. Essentially, his Reconstruction plan intended to: grant general amnesty to the people of the South who swore allegiance to the United States, not including high ranking members of the Confederate forces; establish various departments of Negro affairs, which would be later taken over by the Freedmen's Bureau especially after the war; and finally offer education

⁵ John Hope Franklin, Alfred A. Moss Jr, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 220.

to Blacks on a restrictive basis, to those who were deemed exceptionally qualified for such a system. This last measure was proposed to aid in the recognition of Black citizenship in the Southern states.⁶

Shortly after Vice-President Johnson assumed the role of President in 1865, he made clear that he would essentially follow this plan of Reconstruction outlined by Lincoln. However, Johnson's conflicting views on Black citizenship paired with his Democratic ideologies, caused political difficulty that resulted in apparent disagreements between him and Congress. Ultimately, the beneficiaries of this political back and forth between Congress and the President would be the Southern White Democrats, and the negatively affected group would be the Southern Black Republicans.

In fact, this unfortunate and apparent political upheaval was witnessed by French journalist and later Prime Minister of France Georges Clemenceau when he lived and reported on the United States in 1865 to 1869. He recounted his thoughts on September 28, 1865 in his work *American Reconstruction 1865-1870* regarding the future of politics and the new President when he stated, "Republicans and democrats vie with each other in expressing their friendship for Mr. Johnson, the democrats seeking to win him over, and the Republicans to keep their claim on him. Both parties have held their conventions, in Albany, New York, and the copperheads praised Johnson to the skies, the same Johnson whom three short months ago they were calling Dionysius the Tyrant, accusing of the murder of Mrs. Surratt, Booth's accomplice, and threatening with dire vengeance unless he made haste to drop from his cabinet Stanton, his Secretary of War."⁷ Furthermore, this political fiasco became a concern for Congress when Johnson

⁶ Franklin & Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 224.

⁷ Georges Clemenceau, *American Reconstruction 1865-1870* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), 35.

appointed provisional governors, and legislators in Southern states based on White suffrage, essentially granting Whites home rule over Blacks; and implementing Johnsonian Reconstruction.

By May of 1865 Johnson had recognized and permitted the Unionist governments of Louisiana, Arkansas, and Tennessee that existed under Lincoln to stand, as he began to rapidly restore civil authority to the eight remaining rebel states. In fact, his appointed officials were as followed: “On May 9, he announced that Francis Pierpont, who had headed an Alexandria-based Unionist regime throughout the war, was the legitimate governor of Virginia. Less than three weeks later, on May 29, he named W.W. Holden provisional governor of North Carolina and in the following month and a half appointed provisional governors for South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Texas.”⁸ Additionally, in the other eight rebel states Johnson had permitted his recent gubernatorial appointees the authority to provide their states provisional civil administrations. This authority allowed for the former rebel states to appoint their desired judges, justices of peace, sheriffs, mayors, and constables.⁹ This rapid restoration of civil government in the South enacted by Johnson granted the White Southern Democrats home rule, and societal control over Blacks similar to pre-emancipation. The issued authority to choose their own law and order made it difficult for not only the majority of Southern Blacks to obtain justice, but also for the Freedmen’s Bureau to properly protect the recently freed Blacks. Thus, restored Southern civil governments directly collided with the organizations, amendments and congressional efforts to ensure Blacks easily transitioned from slaves to freedom. The Freedmen’s Bureau, headed by General Oliver Otis Howard, was the primary organization that

⁸ Donald G. Nieman, *To set the law in Motion: The Freedmen’s Bureau and the Legal Rights of Blacks 1865-1868* (New York: KTO Press, 1979), 4.

⁹ Nieman, *To set the law in Motion*, 4.

sought to protect the rights of freed Blacks during the Reconstruction period. Beyond this, the Bureau proposed to allocated land to the recently freed Blacks so that they may cultivate and earn fair wages. However, every strategy and amendment that was issued by the Bureau or Congress was undermined by Southern officials and President Johnson. The Bureau was extremely influential in manufacturing the Black identity post-Civil War. Its efforts and political conflict with the president, and lack of congressional support were directly responsible for the Black identity post-Civil War and the preconditions that led to the Great Migration of the early twentieth century.

Many historians and researchers have largely ignored the importance of land in regard to emancipation. Every act, amendment, and organization that will be covered in this section includes a measure that ensures land for the freed Blacks. The Freedmen's Bureau is not mutually exclusive to this observation. On March 3, 1865 Congress passed a bill creating within the Department of War a Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. Its primary objective was to aid freedmen's transition from slaves to freedom. Since the Bureau was placed under the Department of War, Congressional leaders believed that the military could properly protect the former slaves in their new freedom. Moreover, some in Congress insisted that recently freed Blacks must obtain land if they were to be truly free, otherwise, "they would remain a landless mass of agricultural workers subject to the whims and fancies of the landowners."¹⁰

The dispute between congressional leaders over Black land ownership voided a section of the bill, section thirteen, that would have given the government permanent tenure to confiscated

¹⁰ Claude F. Oubre, *Forty Acres and a Mule: The Freedmen's Bureau and Black Land Ownership* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 20.

and even abandoned land that came out of the Civil War; thus, the Freedmen's Bureau was formed. This section being stricken from the bill, and the bureau being created, meant that the supportive congressional leaders failed to provide permanent land tenure, but did provide for the distribution of land.¹¹

This distribution of land was outlined in section four of the bill and showcased the importance of land as well as the perceived intentions of the Freedmen's Bureau. Some of the more important lines from this section includes:

That the Commissioner, under the direction of the President, shall have authority to set apart, for the use of loyal refugees and freedmen, such tracts of land within the insurrectionary states as shall have been abandoned, or to which the United States shall have acquired title by confiscation or sale, or otherwise; and to every male citizen, whether refugee or freedom as aforesaid, there shall be assigned not more than forty acres of such land, and the person to whom it was so assigned shall be protected in the use and enjoyment of the land for the term of three years at an annual rate not exceeding six per centum upon the value of such land as it was appraised by the State Authorities.¹²

This detailed section of the bill essentially meant that Blacks could attain, and or purchase land if they worked diligently. This newly created agency that was committed to the advancement of the recently freed slaves directly conflicted with Johnson's Southern Democratic governments whose Black Codes were sweeping Southern states along with the simultaneous creation of White secret societies sworn to use guerilla tactics on Blacks.

The beginning years of the Freedmen's Bureau operated in a very chaotic Southern environment. First, Congress took charge of Reconstruction from President Johnson by December 1865. This was followed by the Black Codes that were being put in-place by Southern governments that were meant to curb Blacks and ensure their role as a laboring force in the

¹¹ Oubre, *Forty Acres and a Mule*, 21.

¹² *U.S. Statutes at Large*, vol. XII, 508.

South. These Black Codes were extremely similar to the Slave Codes that existed in the antebellum South and did not respect the rights of Blacks as free individuals. These Black Codes varied by state, but the more general restrictions were enacted to limit the areas in which Blacks could purchase or rent property. Vagrancy laws were enforced with heavy penalties, forcing all Blacks in certain states to work, usually under an apprenticeship, whether they wanted to or not. Further codes were enacted for White employers to control Blacks. Simply stated, Blacks who quit their jobs could be arrested and imprisoned for breach of contract. Also, Johnson's legislative governments enacted these discriminatory codes in the courtroom, meaning that Blacks were not allowed to testify in court except for members of their own race. Furthermore, fines were imposed on Blacks for, "seditious speeches, insulting gestures or acts, absence from work, violating curfew, and the possession of firearms."¹³ Again, these Black Codes, under Johnson's revived civil governments made it extremely difficult for Blacks to experience freedom early on in the post-Civil War South. However, the Freedmen's Bureau did experience limited success from its creation to the later 1870s.

For a brief period of time the Freedmen's Bureau provided needed services to the recently freed Negroes during the Reconstruction period. These successes promoted the presence of the Black identity, and even instilled a great sense of pride amongst Southern Blacks as many were elected to political office and earning decent wages because of the bureau's influence. One of the first successes of the Freedmen's Bureau, backed by Congress, was General Orders No. 3. On January 12, 1866, the War Department issued General Orders No. 3 which, "authorized military commanders to intervene to protect from civil prosecution military personnel arrested for actions done under orders, loyalists charged with offenses against the Confederacy or in

¹³ Franklin & Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 225.

connection with the use of abandoned land and property in compliance with military directives, and blacks charged with offenses for which white persons are not prosecuted or punished in the same manner and degree.”¹⁴ This order was a direct counter to the Black Codes that were being observed in many Southern states and came a day after Illinois Senator Lyman Trumbull reported his two bills out of the Joint Committee on Reconstructions. This committee created by Thaddeus Stevens, a Republican leader, aimed to make recommendations for new policy in the Johnsonian South. The first bill reported by Trumbull to the president was expected to extend the life of the Bureau and expand its powers. The second bill sought to guarantee civil rights to Blacks. The bill to strengthen the Freedmen’s Bureau was vetoed by President Johnson on the grounds, “that it was unconstitutional and proposed to do more for blacks than had ever been done for whites.”¹⁵

President Johnson also vetoed the second bill, the civil rights bill, declaring, “that blacks were not yet ready for the privileges and equalities of citizens.”¹⁶ Johnson’s veto of these two bills, and the condemnation of the proposed Fourteenth Amendment which would eventually grant Blacks civil rights, enraged Congress. Since Congress were now in charge of Reconstruction, on April 9, 1866 the civil rights bill and the proposed Fourteenth Amendment were passed over the president’s veto.¹⁷ This amendment provided Blacks with federal intervention in cases where state and local authorities failed to protect the civil rights of individuals. This bill meant that Blacks had federal support from the bureau agents in Southern judicial courts, representing a second success of the congressional Reconstruction period.

¹⁴ Paul A. Cimballa, Randall M. Miller, *The Freedmen’s Bureau and Reconstruction: Reconsiderations* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), 12.

¹⁵ Franklin & Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 226.

¹⁶ Franklin & Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 226.

¹⁷ Cimballa and Miller, *The Freedmen’s Bureau*, 13.

Southern states rejected the Fourteenth Amendment and instead continued to enact Black Codes which worked in favor of the White majority, which created a widespread disorder in these states. The intentional disregard for the Freedmen's Bureau and the amendments that were in place to aid in Blacks transition to freedom, made congressional leaders deal with the South harshly. This created a space where Blacks would experience limited success until government neglect and White supremacist groups began to gain prominence.

By 1869 the Fifteenth Amendment was passed by Congress giving Blacks the right to vote, granting them greater power in elections, and giving the Republican party a mass number of supporters. Additionally, in 1867 Congress also passed the Reconstruction Act as a result of the Joint Committee's resolve to deal with the South harshly. This act was a significant precursor for the Fifteenth Amendment in that it rendered the established Southern civil governments who rejected the Fourteenth Amendment, subject to military authority. Stated simply, "it authorized the five district commanders who would supervise the reestablishment of civil governments in compliance with Republican guidelines to employ military tribunals, if necessary, to protect freed people. Subsequent legislation empowered the district commanders to remove uncooperative civil authorities."¹⁸ In addition to this clause included in the act, congressional leaders made it mandatory for a convention in each state to draft a revised constitution acceptable to Congress, all former Confederate states were to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment; and any former Confederate who did not take the ironclad oath swearing allegiance to the United States will be disfranchised.¹⁹ This Reconstruction Act of 1867 complemented the Fifteenth Amendment because now Blacks who were permitted to vote, did so with the

¹⁸ Cimballa and Miller, *The Freedmen's Bureau*, 22.

¹⁹ Franklin & Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 226.

protection of federal forces. These victories of the Congressional Reconstruction not only eliminated the biased viewpoints of a Southern Democratic president, it also allowed for Blacks to be elected to political office and pursue education.

Undoubtedly, the Freedmen's Bureau was created and operated in an atmosphere of extreme hostility. Not only did the Black Codes seek to directly undermine the Bureau along with any other federal provision that supported Blacks, but secret White supremacy societies were also a major concern during this period. From the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment until the withdrawal of the federal troops in the South in 1877, White supremacist groups and Black organizations were at odds usually resulting in acts of violence as a measure to scare off African American communities. Since 1865 well known secret societies such as the Ku Klux Klan were harassing freed Blacks with acts of violence and intimidation, especially after the passing of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, properly dubbed the Reconstruction Amendments by many historians throughout the generations.²⁰ Many Northern Blacks who did not experience racial violence from White communities on the scale of Southern Blacks, began to create and expand their own organizations that promoted the growing Black identity. One of the early organizations that promoted a sense of identity for recently freed Blacks were the Prince Hall Freemasons.

From 1866 until the end of the Reconstruction period, Northern Colored newspapers included Freemason advertisements as a tool for recruitment. One example of this Northern strategy was evident in a Cincinnati, Ohio magazine titled *Colored Citizen* when a masonic advertisement read, "The St. Johns Lodge, No. 3, of F.A.A.Y. Masons will hold stated meeting

²⁰ Mary Farmer-Kaiser, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen's Bureau: Race, Gender, & Public Policy in the age of Emancipation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.), 12.

on the 1st and 3rd Fridays in each month. All M.M.S. in good standing are invited to attend. By order of the W.M.”²¹ The opportunity for identity movements in the Northern states was greater primarily due to the fact that the Union states accepted emancipation and the amendments that followed and had established streams of income in which their societies prospered and experienced moderate success. By 1869 the Freedmen’s Bureau worked diligently as a relief agency for the former slaves and disenfranchised Whites. For example, as outlined by historians John Hope Franklin and Alfred Moss Jr, “Between 1865 and 1869 the bureau issued 21 million rations, approximately 5 million going to whites and 15 million going to blacks. By 1867 there were forty-six hospitals under the bureau staffed by physicians, surgeons, and nurses. The medical department spent over \$2 million to improve the health of ex-slaves and treated more than 450,000 cases of illness. The death rate among former slaves was reduced, and sanitary conditions were improved.”²²

In addition to this, during this brief period the Freedmen’s Bureau sought to protect Blacks’ right to choose their own employers, ensuring that both parties properly fulfilled their requirements of legally binding contracts. In these matters’ bureau agents would consult with Southern Planters and ex-slaves to ensure the contracts benefitted both parties. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, Bureau agents organized freedmen’s courts, which provided jurisdiction over minor civil cases related to Blacks. Moreover, education was by far the greatest success of the Reconstruction period. Aside from establishing various day, night, Sunday, and industrial schools where trades were taught, the bureau worked closely with Northern religious and self-help philanthropic organizations to establish multiple colleges dedicated to educating Blacks.

²¹ W. Bell, “Masonic Notice,” *Colored Citizen*, May 19, 1866, 2.

²² Franklin & Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 229.

The higher learning institutions that received funding from the Bureau were Howard University, Hampton Institute, St. Augustine's College, Atlanta University, Fisk University, Storer College, and Bible Memorial Institute, later renamed Johnson C. Smith University.²³ These education initiatives were extremely successful in educating former slaves and by 1869 there were, "9,503 teachers in schools for former slaves in the South."²⁴ Also, by 1870, when the educational work of the bureau had stopped, there were 247,333 pupils in 4,329 schools.²⁵ In fact, referring to the withdrawal of federal supervision in Virginia, Black Richmond educator R.M. Manly stated, "There was some driftwood and a few pieces of rotten wood. This was to be expected where the executive officers of the Association were sending hundreds of teachers, received on recommendation, to all parts of the South. But poor material or indifferent material was in very small proportion to the whole. And there was much of the best work I ever saw done. The young ladies were, in many cases, from homes of affluence and refinement and the highest Christian principle."²⁶

The last and possibly most significant success of the Reconstruction period, besides from education, was the establishment and expansion of Black churches. By 1870, Blacks had withdrawn from White churches and formed multiple Colored Churches based on various Christian denominations. The most dominant and influential separate churches to emerge during this period were: The Colored Cumberland Presbyterian, Colored Primitive Baptists in America, the Colored Methodist Episcopal church. Also, older established churches experienced immense growth in membership during this period. In fact, by 1876 the African Methodist Episcopal churches in the South membership exceeded 200,000 and Black Baptists had 500,000. These

²³ Franklin & Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 230.

²⁴ Franklin & Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 230.

²⁵ Franklin & Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 231.

²⁶ Annual Reports, Tenth Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (1880), 130.

churches represented the first social institution controlled by the African Americans and it instilled an immense amount of pride in the community and allowed for many of the ministers to hold leadership positions throughout the duration of the Reconstruction era. These influential Reconstruction leaders who began their roles as church ministers included, “Bishop H.M. Turner of Georgia, the Reverend R.H. Cain of South Carolina, and Bishop J.W. Hood of North Carolina were a few political leaders who gained much of their experience in the black church.”²⁷ With these great successes of radical Reconstruction, the primary questions that may arise are, where did it go wrong? And how did the failure of Reconstruction contribute to the Southern society that came after it, resulting in the Great Migration and the forming of counter-identity movements of the early twentieth century? Two possible answers to these loaded questions can be found in the rise of White supremacist groups, thereby expanding Southern Democratic ideology, and White rule; and the election of 1876 where Congress gave the reins of Southern society to these ex-Confederate Democrats.

As mentioned earlier, the successes of radical Reconstruction were quickly challenged by organized White Southern groups that were committed to controlling Blacks and enacting a Southern Democratic agenda. As Northern teachers and bureau agents who believed Republicanism was an effective tool to combat Southern oppression and secure Black freedom, many White disenfranchised ex-Confederates viewed a Democratic agenda as a device to rapidly end radical Reconstruction and restore order in favor of White supremacy. As Northern agencies began to be organized in various Southern states, such as The United League of America, secret societies began to form shortly after Reconstruction was under the control of congressional leaders in 1867. For a span of ten years, the main Southern grassroots White supremacy groups

²⁷ Franklin & Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 232.

that flourished and were active in overthrowing Reconstruction were: “the Knights of the White Camelia, the Constitutional Union Guards, the Pale Faces, the White Brotherhood, the Council of Safety, the 76 Association, and the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.”²⁸ Again, the main goals of these groups were to control Blacks and overthrow radical Reconstruction at all costs. This meant that violence and intimidation of Blacks was a frequent instrument used by these groups. The more powerful groups during this decade, KKK and Knights of the White Camelia, used these acts of intimidation in society and business strategically evading any efforts for bureau suppression because the group’s members were sworn to secrecy. These White supremacy groups used bribery, and arson at the polls to discourage Blacks from voting Republican, believing that by depriving them from political equality they were in fact fulfilling a noble crusade that was justified by the Christian belief, that served as a catalyst for many of their actions.

In Southern states, Blacks were run out of town for attempting to vote in elections, and for those who resisted, thus deemed insubordinate, were brutally whipped, maimed and hanged.²⁹ For Black women, if not hanged, these groups used other acts to intimidate them. In fact, according to historian Mary Farmer-Kaiser, “By 1868 White vigilante groups such as the Ku Klux Klan had perfected its campaign of widespread terror and employed rape as a gendered tool for racial control directed at upending the consequences of emancipation.”³⁰ Furthermore, Northern Colored newspapers were reporting on the violent acts of the White supremacist organizations. For instance, by 1868, these newspapers had sections labeled *The South*. For example, a New York based newspaper named the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* mentions

²⁸ Franklin & Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 249.

²⁹ Franklin & Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 250.

³⁰ Farmer-Kaiser, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen’s Bureau*, 163.

under their section titled A WEST VIRGINIAN MURDERED BY KU-KLUX, “It was reported in this city yesterday that Chase McClung, who removed from Harrison County, this state, to Missouri last spring, was taken out of his house a few days ago, by a party of Ku-Klux, and hanged. Two sons, who were with him at the time escaped and have returned to Harrison County. We have no particulars. A citizen of Moundsville, who has just returned from Missouri, makes this statement.”³¹ Paired with acts of violence, efforts to suppress these organizations were extremely unsuccessful. When heavy fines, and possible imprisonment threats failed, Congress passed a series of laws in 1870 and 1871 to suppress acts of violence and bribery in local governments. In 1870, a law was passed prohibiting bribery, force and intimidation as a tool to prevent voting; thus, President Grant was authorized to use land and naval forces to prevent such acts.³² A law was passed in 1871 to strengthen the first, and it was designed to put an end to the Ku Klux Klan after an investigation verified that they were still active after their perceived dissolution in 1869. Conversely, in 1871, the ironclad amnesty oath that many ex-Confederates declined to swear and were thereby disqualified in the revised Union, was repealed. Thus, by the following year, Southern society that resembled that of pre-emancipation.³³

After a general amnesty oath restored the franchise in 1872, not to include various ex-Confederate officials, the White Democratic agenda began to rapidly sweep the Southern states. By pardoning White Southerners, the Democratic party quickly revived returning to power in all Southern states. The Border states were the first to be controlled by the Democratic party, after featuring Conservatives during the Reconstruction period. As Southern Democrats won partial to full control in Southern states, by 1876 the Republicans only had claim to South Carolina,

³¹ Aaron M. Powell, “The South”, *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, September 12, 1868, 1.

³² Franklin & Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 250.

³³ Franklin & Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 251.

Florida, and Louisiana. Furthermore, as Republican governments began dissolving in Southern states, being replaced by Democratic civil authorities, the Republican party faced allegations of corruption. These allegations of extreme misgovernment through acts of bribery, embezzlement, misappropriation of funds and other fraudulent practices, strengthened the case for a Democratic party in the South. Thus, the Republicans could not actively hasten the expansion of Southern Democratic civil governments because they were occupied with their allegations of internal corruption.³⁴ Extensive corruption had discredited the Republican party and during this period of White home rule, Blacks' crops and farms were burned, destroyed and lynched for voting Republican, prompting many Blacks to remain home and not participate in society.

The election of 1876 included a program to end Reconstruction and featured candidates committed to re-directing Northern interest on more profitable avenues like the oncoming industrial revolution. In fact, Republican Presidential candidate Rutherford B. Hayes promised to not only withdrawal federal troops in the South but ensured that the Southern Democratic states would have better representation in Washington, as well as receive government subsidies to aid in internal improvements. When Hayes became president, the troops were withdrawn in 1877, in 1878 the use of armed forces in elections were forbidden, in 1894 appropriations for special federal marshals and supervisors of elections were cut off; and as a last measure of White home rule, "in 1898 the last disabilities laid on disloyal and rebellious Southerners were removed in a final amnesty."³⁵ The South now ruled with White civil governments and without Black interference. Thus, the space was created for Jim Crow to oppress Blacks in the Southern states. As the new century opened, Southern society had become dominated by White rule which

³⁴ Franklin & Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 253.

³⁵ Franklin & Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 254.

included the segregation of the races, and the mistreatment of Blacks through violence or societal oppression to become a norm in the Southern states. The eventual leaders of the Moorish Science Temple of America, and Nation of Islam were coming of age during this period of Southern Jim Crow. This environment, along with other factors, prompted Blacks to flee the South in search of higher wages and societal equality. These experiences influenced the formation of counter-identity groups once Blacks were settled in Northern cities and the identities of sharecropping, penniless, country-folk were far behind them.

CHAPTER 3

TIMOTHY DREW'S MOORS

The opening of the twentieth century featured an acceleration of the industrial revolution in northern cities and an acceleration of the Jim Crow system in the South. This period of American apartheid was very much motivated by the discriminatory laws and acts that closed out the nineteenth century. After Tennessee adopted its first Jim Crow law in 1875 the entire South began to follow suit enacting discriminatory laws systematically oppressing Blacks. By this year, Blacks and Whites were separated on trains, in depots, and on wharves. Furthermore, by 1883 the Supreme Court outlawed the Civil Rights Acts of 1875 prompting Blacks to be banned from White barber shops, hotels, restaurants, and entertainment theatres.

Moreover, by 1885 many southern states had enacted laws and drafted new constitutions that required separate schooling systems. This measure established a firm color line in the South, setting the stage for the most aggressive system for segregation of the races; and was displayed on a national scale in 1896 when the Supreme Court upheld its separate but equal doctrine set forth in *Plessy v. Ferguson*³⁶. As the color lines became more established in the southern states, the first years of the twentieth century tragically featured two hundred and fourteen lynchings of Blacks. Southern governments continued separation of the races in order to ensure White home rule was upheld and society mirrored that of pre-emancipation. This reversion to a White dominated South created an atmosphere in which the laws, the courts, the schools, and almost every institution favored Whites. Unfortunately, this is the era where Timothy Drew, later known as Noble Drew Ali, was coming of age and realizing the social status of African Americans.

³⁶ Franklin & Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 262.

With the Freedmen's Bureau absence in the South, a Black identity was greatly unrecognized by the vast majority, due to the oppressive societies in which they lived. The Bureau advocated for Blacks to be educated and learn labor skills to actively participate in American society; thus, creating an identity of educated, hardworking, freed Blacks. When Reconstruction was overthrown and disseminated by 1877, this new system of White rule reigned in the South. It was not until America's entrance into the first World War where the tides began to change for Southern Blacks who fled these systems in search of higher wages and social equality. Amongst the earliest waves of migration was Timothy Drew whose own life experiences up to this point had influenced an organization that began a chain reaction to counter-identity movements. Not much is known about Drew's early life before he founded the Moorish Science Temple of America. Most of his early life is largely based on mysticism and lore before he founded his first temple in 1913. When cross examining counter-identity movements it is imperative to begin with the Moorish Science Temple of America mainly because it was amongst the first groups to be formed post-emancipation, that actively dealt with the issue of identity. Exploring the main components of the organization's ideology, message, and structural make-up will showcase how this group's distinct response to White racism was significant to the issue of Black identity in the early twentieth century.

Without any true or trustworthy sources that verify Timothy Drew's background and upbringing, there are various theories that surround his early life and ancestral roots. These theories, created by historians and many of his followers, provide insight to Drew's early influences that may be responsible for the forming of his Islamic sect. Asserted by Essien-Udom, what is said to be known about Timothy Drew is that he was born on January 8, 1886 in rural

Simpsonbuck County North Carolina.³⁷ However, according to historian Michael A. Gomez, “As this North Carolina county did not and does not exist, one can only speculate about the circumstances of his birth, and that he may have come from North Carolina’s eastern counties. Furthermore, consistent with his shrouded origins, few of the details concerning Timothy Drew’s childhood and early development are verifiable.”³⁸ In light of these conflicting speculations concerning Drew’s early beginnings, Gomez conclusively asserts, as results from his extensive research, that Drew grew up and achieved adolescence in a part of the South in close proximity to coastal North Carolina. Gomez’s assertion in regard to Drew’s early beginnings and possible birthplace is the most recent contribution to the historiography and attempts to solve the conundrum that is Timothy Drew’s early life.

It is vital to mention that this hypothesized area in which he grew up was heavily overran by the Jim Crow system explained earlier, and heavily influenced by Muslim traditions. Gomez makes clear in his work that in this area, “The Islamic legacy was palpable along the coast and in the Sea Islands, where Sapelo resident Harriet Hall Grovner may well have been a practicing Muslim until her demise in 1922. Moreover, at least a decade after this, Lorenzo Turner was collecting names and terms in the coastal area reflecting a profound Muslim influence.”³⁹ Gomez offers these theories and possible influences in an attempt to shine light on of Noble Drew Ali’s early embrace of Islam that he later brought with him to the northern states. According to various accounts, Ali fled the South by 1920 and mysteriously died by 1930. If Drew was so inclined to form a Muslim sect in the 1920s it can be assumed that he was exposed to a vibrant Islamic

³⁷ Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism*, 33.

³⁸ Gomez, *Black Crescent*, 204.

³⁹ Gomez, *Black Crescent*, 205.

presence during his adolescence years. Moreover, his motivations for forming the Moorish Science Temple of America are still topics of great debate.

The many diverse legends that have developed around Noble Drew Ali's identity and activities before 1913 were formed by his early followers that joined his Islamic sect during the first wave of the Great Migration.⁴⁰ Some believed that he was a child of ex-slaves and raised amongst the Cherokee Native Americans. Others, especially after his death hypothesized that he was a direct descendant of Bilali Mohammed, the famous African Muslim slave who inhabited Sapelo island, located in McIntosh County, Georgia, in early nineteenth century.⁴¹ Moreover, there are four other theories related to what influenced Ali to create the Moorish Science Temple of America. The first theory claims that Ali was an orphan who spent his teenage years wondering with a gypsy group. At the age of sixteen, a gypsy woman took the young Ali to Egypt where he studied in the famous Essence Schools; and then returned to the states to settle in Newark, New Jersey to work as a merchant seaman and would later create the Moorish Science Temple of America. The second and more popular related theory proclaims that Ali returned to Egypt and met with the last priest of an ancient cult of high magic in the early twentieth century. During this return to Egypt, it is claimed that he proved himself a prophet by finding his way out of the ancient pyramids.

The third theory claims that he received a charter from the sheikhs to teach Islam in America after he returned from Morocco and Saudi Arabia. It is also claimed that during these travels he received the name Ali from Sultan Abdul Ibn Said in Mecca. After this, it is believed that he returned to the United States in 1910, where he worked briefly as a train expressman and

⁴⁰ Turner, *Islam*, 90.

⁴¹ Turner, *Islam*, 92.

joined the Prince Hall Masons. The final and most popular accepted theory is that Ali traveled to Washington D.C. in 1912 and asked President Woodrow Wilson if he, Ali, could teach his people Islam, the ancient religion of their ancient forefathers.⁴² Along with this request, it is claimed that Ali asked President Wilson, “That the nationality, Moorish American, and the names, Ali, Bey, and El, and the flag of Morocco which was taken away from his people in the colonial era, be given back.”⁴³ Nevertheless, according to Turner, a report published by the Associated Negro Press, is closer to the truth. This report claims that Ali was accompanying a Hindu fakir in traveling circus shows when he simply decided to start an order of his own.⁴⁴

Although, Noble Drew Ali’s background and exact upbringing is difficult to verify before 1913, his creation of the Moorish Science Temple is very well documented and understood. In fact, this response to White southern racism is one of the driving factors why some Black migrants joined this movement which offered a refreshed identity in sharp contrast to that of their southern counterparts. In 1913, at the age of twenty-seven, with the advice of Ali’s mentor, leader of the Mahometanism movement in New York, and alleged Egyptian high priest Dr. Abdul Hamid Suleiman, Ali established the Canaanite Temple in Newark New Jersey. Ali, who was said to be a short man in stature began preaching his message and doctrine in basements, empty lots, and on street corners. With waves of Blacks migrating to Northern cities and with Ali’s captivating Asiatic/separatist ideology, over the next decade, membership reportedly reached thirty thousand, with Newark, New Jersey being the first series of worship centers that would collectively come to be known as the Moorish Science Temple of America.⁴⁵ Ali used his speculated experiences during the earlier years of the twentieth century presumably traveling the

⁴² Turner, *Islam*, 91-92.

⁴³ Turner, *Islam*, 92.

⁴⁴ Turner, *Islam*, 92.

⁴⁵ Turner, *Islam*, 92.

world learning about the Islamic faith and organized religion, to strategically create an organization that would appeal to the migrating Blacks that sought after an alternative way of life that promoted an prideful anthropological identity.

America's entrance into the first World War served as one of the primary causes for the Great Migration. Undoubtedly, the tense racial situation created by Jim Crow in the Southern states was a contributing factor. However, the economic motives of Northern and Midwestern industrialists serve as the prime factor for migration. By 1914 as European countries began to send troops to participate in the global conflict, European migration was suddenly halted in the United States. As more countries began to enter the war, foreign born men steamed home from major industrial hubs such as Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit, Toledo, and Chicago leaving mills and mines vacant. With thousands of skilled and unskilled labor jobs becoming vacant, northern and Midwestern industrialist agents began to look South for workers. For cities like Chicago and even Cleveland whose economic life depended upon these foreign-born immigrants to handle their meat, wheat, and steel, they now experienced a manpower crisis at a moment where profit was highest and production demands were greater. This motive paired with the natural disasters that were plaguing Southern crops all serve as reasons for the Great Migration. In fact, by 1914, the cotton kingdom of the South had been ravaged by the boll weevil sweeping up from Mexico for several years. Furthermore, "Flood and famine, too, had continually harassed the cotton farmers of the Mississippi Valley."⁴⁶

Labor recruitment agents for industrial companies now had motive to travel South and actively recruit, Black plantation laborers to travel North and work jobs with higher wages than

⁴⁶ St. Clair Drake, Horace R. Clayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc, 1945), 58.

offered in the southern states. According to scholars St. Clair Drake and Horace Clayton, recruiting agents traveled South, “begging Negroes to come North; they sometimes carried free tickets in their pockets, and always glowing promises on their tongues.”⁴⁷ With promises of fortunes and social equality, Blacks came in droves to Northern and Midwestern cities. The decade that witnessed the greatest influx of African Americans was 1910 to 1920. During this decade Northern and Midwestern cities’ Black population began to swell tremendously. In fact, between 1910 and 1920 the African American population rose, “some 59 percent in Philadelphia, 66 percent in New York, 148 percent in Chicago, and 611 percent in Detroit; by 1920 nearly 40 percent of the Northern Black population was to be found in these four cities alone.”⁴⁸ Furthermore, one of the primary factors for Black migration during this period was higher wages in the northern and midwestern states.

On average, in these northern and midwestern states, “Afro-American workers earned between \$3.00 and \$3.60 per day; steelworkers could make as much as \$4.50. In the South only, 4 percent ever made more than \$3.00 daily. The top pay for Afro-American steelworkers in Birmingham, Alabama, was \$2.50 for a nine-hour day in 1915.”⁴⁹ These economic advantages prompted nearly six million African Americans to flee South and settle into these major cities across America. Chicago and Detroit were especially significant hubs for Black migration, commonly referred to as Black Metropolises because they offered safe havens to Blacks in which they virtually controlled their own neighborhoods. This became increasingly important for migrating Blacks. They desired a new and improved religious, political, economic, social, and

⁴⁷ Drake and Clayton, *Black Metropolis*, 58.

⁴⁸ Gomez, *Black Crescent*, 208.

⁴⁹ David L. Lewis, *When Harlem was in Vogue* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc, 1981), 20.

psychological systems in their new communities; that were different from what they had faced in the South.

In these new cities Blacks were committed to establishing systems that catered to their needs and concerns and provided them social equality. This view of a socially equal atmosphere, which included neighborhoods dedicated to representing the new Negro encouraged the growth of new urban religious and political movements. In this case, historian Richard Brent Turner has emphasized, that “the African American urban experience helps us understand how Black urbanites responded to their environment, as poverty and discrimination encouraged organization. Furthermore, in this context, American Islam can be viewed as a positive response to their new, urban, environment, for her migrants remade it both physically and cognitively to fit their needs.”⁵⁰ Thus, formation of counter-identity movements can be seen as an intellectual response to the racism that existed in the South, and how these new urban Black neighborhoods dealt with the issue of their lingering identity. It was to be made over. Individuals like Timothy Drew, Marcus Garvey, and Elijah Muhammad created and emphasized manufactured anthropological history to provide a new identity to African Americans. Therefore, neighborhoods in Black Metropolises, such as the Black Belt in Chicago or the Black Bottom in Detroit and even Harlem, became epicenters of culture and recruiting grounds for rank-and-file members to join their organizations.

Stated plainly, Noble Drew Ali noticed the wave of urbanization as well as the influx of Blacks into Northern and Midwestern cities. After he established the Canaanite Temple in 1913, Ali strategically began placing temples in locations where Black population was extremely high in an attempt to reach mass amounts of potential recruits. Subsequently, after 1913, the growth of

⁵⁰ Turner, *Islam*, 74.

Noble Drew Ali's organization "constituted a social movement of significance, with temples in such places as Richmond, and Petersburg, Virginia, and Charleston, West Virginia, as well as Pine Bluff, Arkansas; Baltimore, Cleveland; and Youngstown, Ohio. Furthermore, Northern centers included Milwaukee, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Chicago, and significantly, Lansing and Detroit, Michigan, the latter the site of Elijah Muhammad's initial encounter with W.D. Fard Muhammad around 1930."⁵¹ It is important to note that by 1930 over one million African Americans had left the South and settled into the North, seeking a better life. Some of them accepted the message of Timothy Drew's recently established organization. Noble Drew Ali's movement experienced a spike in membership after two pivotal events that shifted the course of the organization. The Red Summer riots of 1919 showcased to the nation and to Blacks in the Northern and Midwestern states that racism remained an issue in their new neighborhoods; and the challenge of factionalism in Ali's organization forced a re-structure of his movement which included a name change, headquarters change, as well as a revisal in his source doctrine. By late 1918 as Black soldiers began to return home and racial tensions accelerated in Northern and Midwestern Black Metropolises, Black resistance morphed into Black militancy which created a space for various riots and blatant displays of racism. Even before the end of the war, African Americans wanted to protect their social rights that they had established in their neighborhoods. Conversely, as early as 1917, when Whites became increasingly hostile toward Blacks, because of employment and housing competition, Blacks were greeted with violent riots.

The two most vicious race riots during this period occurred in East St. Louis, 1917, and Chicago in 1919, which resulted in eighty-five deaths and over one thousand people injured.⁵²

⁵¹ Gomez, *Black Crescent*, 208.

⁵² Turner, *Islam*, 75.

Also, in 1919 White mobs had rampaged Black neighborhoods in Washington D.C resulting in many deaths and numerous injuries.⁵³ The blatant displays of racism associated with these riots were reminiscent of Southern oppression pre-migration. What was unexpected and not so familiar in these race conflicts was the resistance of Blacks. In virtually all of the race riots that occurred from 1917 to 1919, Blacks took up arms, fought back, and even formed their own militias to fight against the opposing White factions at the time. This new form of Black militancy that was displayed to a national audience influenced many who participated in the skirmishes to join counter-identity movements to both protect their neighborhoods and enhance the status of their manufactured identity. Although, African American counter-identity movements have historically not attracted large memberships, those who decided to join were extremely loyal and faithfully followed their leaders.

With any movement that gains a quick and steady following, challenges are inevitable. The challenge to Noble Drew Ali's leadership appeared in 1916 in the form of factionalism. This first challenge became apparent when one faction of the Moorish Science community that stayed in the Newark, New Jersey began to refer to themselves as the Holy Moabite Temple of the World. Thus, beginning their own organization and professing their unique ideology. This particular challenge did not hinder the progression of Ali's movement. In fact, by 1923 he moved to the bustling Black Metropolis of Chicago setting up a permanent headquarters of his sect naming it the Moorish Science Temple of America to further separate his movement from that of the growing Holy Moabite Temple of the World back in Newark, New Jersey. The final name change occurred in 1928 as the movement began to establish more temples and gain a steady

⁵³ Kevin K. Gains, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996, 216.

membership. In addition to this, Ali organized all of his temples under the name of Moorish Divine and National Movement of North America Inc, properly numbering his temples as well.⁵⁴ With an organizational structure, an established name, and the surge of Black militancy becoming a popular sentiment in many African American communities, MSTA gained a following and began to become more popular during the post-World War I era. Ali's unique message to Blacks contributed to this growth. This message was prepared in doctrine that was directly meant and aimed at African Americans or displaced Moors, as Ali labeled them, that were situated in post-World War I America. It sought to inform African Americans of their anthropological past and ancestral heritage. Ali's message also created a psychic escape for Blacks in the form of an Asiatic identity with the religion of Islam at its center.⁵⁵ His message represented a very unique view of African Americans in the United States and was responsible for, "the first mass religious movement in the history of Islam in America."⁵⁶

The overall message and doctrine professed by Noble Drew Ali was clear and recorded in his life's work. He professes in the source document of his movement titled the *Holy Koran of the Moorish Holy Temple of Science, or Circle Seven Koran* produced in 1926, "The fallen sons and daughters of the Asiatic Nation of North America need to learn to love instead of hate; and to know of his higher and lower self. This is the uniting of the Holy Koran of Mecca, for teaching and instructing all Moorish Americans, etc."⁵⁷ In reference to the higher and lower self Ali states, "There are two selves; the higher and lower self. The higher self is human spirit clothed with soul, made in the form of Allah. The lower self, the carnal self, the body of desires, is a

⁵⁴ Turner, *Islam*, 91-92.

⁵⁵ C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 47.

⁵⁶ Turner, *Islam*, 92.

⁵⁷ Noble Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran of the Moorish Holy Temple of Science: Reprint of the Original 1929 Publication* (Califa Media: A Moorish Guide Publishing Company, 2014), 56.

reflection of higher self, distorted by the murky ethers of the flesh.”⁵⁸ With this simple message representing the essential image of the Moorish Science Temple of America, Noble Drew Ali was able to set in place structural rules and regulations that were meant to guide his members to religious and societal freedom. These rules and regulations that were set in place for the sect members carried with them elements of social and political constructs that were granted to the newly labeled American Moors. With the Moorish Americans’ quest for a counter-identity and experience separate from that of the African Americans during the post-World War I period they consciously altered their appearance and way of thinking to further separate themselves and therefore praise their anthropological past and reject that of African Americans.

Some of the main components of Ali’s movement were his basic rules and regulations. One of the more symbolic regulation was a strict standard of dress, a uniform to signify their allegiance to Ali’s cause. Ali’s Moors donned Black fezzes and white turbans to align more with the common dress of Orthodox Islam in the African country of Morocco. Noble Drew Ali cared little about orthodox Islam but understood that certain aspects from the religion must be used to create a familiar and organized counter-identity. In following some aspects of orthodox Islam, apart from the Moroccan style of dress, they followed dietary laws that were laid out and expounded upon by Noble Drew Ali. Adhering to the Muslim belief, the main components of this dietary law professed to his followers prohibited the consumption of pork of any kind. Ali professed that “pork was a meat that African Americans were forced to eat in slavery and therefore a dietary symbol of oppression.”⁵⁹ Paired with these symbols of signification including

⁵⁸ Ali, *The Holy Koran*, 7.

⁵⁹ Turner, *Islam*, 94.

their uniform and dietary laws, Ali and his Moors embraced an anthropological past that insisted on Blacks' vibrant Moroccan ancestry.

To embrace this ancestry, Moors carried nationality cards that displayed and promoted this perceived ancestral status. They also had a flag for their movement, which foreshadowed the Black Power Movement of 1960s and the various organizations that hoisted a flag to signify their message. Their red flag featured a five-pointed star in the center of it, further recalling their Moroccan ancestry by flying the flag of Morocco. Furthermore, the Moors claimed that they were not, and did not want to be associated with Negroes, Blacks, or Colored people. They insisted that they were instead, "Olive-skinned Asiatic people who were the descendants of Moroccans."⁶⁰ Thus, they not only denied the affinity of Negroes to the white center of power, but they also attempted to differentiate themselves from the Negro-ness or from their subculture," with these actions to form their counter-identity.⁶¹

This anthropological message was the basis of ideology, attempting to offer African Americans in the early twentieth century an Asiatic identity that was based in their Moroccan ancestry. Moreover, Noble Drew Ali insisted that, "For a people to amount to anything, it is necessary to have a name, nation, and land," clearly professing a similar kind of identity ideology expressed by the agents of the Freedmen's Bureau during the Reconstruction period.⁶² This importance for power in one's name influenced Ali's sect to refer to themselves as Asiatics, Moors, or Moorish Americans, to further display their lineage separate from the other Americans who were called Negroes, Black folk, Colored people, or Ethiopians.⁶³ Noble Drew Ali asserted

⁶⁰ Turner, *Islam*, 93.

⁶¹ Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism*, 34.

⁶² Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism*, 34.

⁶³ Ethiopian- As explained by Essien-Udom, the word Ethiopian signifies division, Negro, Black, means death, and colored signifies something that is painted and does not accurately apply to a race or ethnic group of peoples.

that, “the name is all meaningful, for by stripping him of his Asiatic name and calling him Negro, Black, Colored, or Ethiopian, the European, or White, robbed the Moor of his power, his authority, his God, and every worthwhile possession.”⁶⁴

Along with this message to African Americans, Noble Drew Ali also included within his doctrine a purpose for his divine leadership. The Moors proclaimed that the true purpose for the creation of the Moorish Science Temple, was so that Noble Drew Ali could lift the fallen Asiatic nation of North America by teaching its members their true religion Islam, their true nationality, their true genealogy, and their true anthropological history. The practice of wearing fezzes and carrying a nationality card gave the Moors a sense of pride that rested on their Moroccan ancestry. A pride to have a lineage of ancestry that they could trace back to Africa. To further motivate his followers and enhance his image of a divine gift to African Americans, Ali took this ideology of lineage and self-pride a step further with the concept of tracing the Moors’ genealogy directly to Jesus himself. This ideology was the primary focus of Ali’s *Holy Koran* or *Circle Seven Koran*. This text not only focused on the genealogy of Jesus, in relation to the American Moors, but it also discusses his supposed life and work in India, Europe, and Africa; further proclaiming the connection and lineage between Jesus and the American Moors. Although, this text recognizes Jesus as the savior and or forbearer of the American Moors, Noble Drew Ali’s final message of the text cemented the role of Islam and the American Moors’ status within the American experience.

Noble Drew Ali’s *Holy Koran* or *Circle Seven Koran* contends that Christianity is a religion meant for Europeans, and that Islam is the religion for the Asiatic nations; with the final message being that the civilization was in the hands of the descendants of the Asiatic nations.

⁶⁴ Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism*, 34.

Furthermore, Ali claimed that until each group, all populations within the United States had its own peculiar religion there will be no peace on earth. Ali maintained that various groups of peoples were the descendants of Canaan and Ham and therefore the original Asiatic nations. Among them, “he numbered the Egyptians, the Arabians, the Japanese, the Chinese, the Indians, the people of South and Central America, the Turks and the African Americans.”⁶⁵ This short text, sixty-four pages in total, was compiled from four main sources, “which were: the Quran, the Bible, the Aquarian Gospels of Jesus Christ, and Unto Thee I Grant, which was the main literature of the Rosicrucian Brotherhood, a Masonic order influenced by lore concerning the Egyptian mystery schools.”⁶⁶ Based upon this myriad of sources used by Ali to create his religious doctrine, he was apparently well versed and greatly influenced by many other social movements and sects. Furthermore, “Noble Drew Ali, the self-styled prophet of modern American Islam, appropriated ideas and symbols not only from Garveyism but also from the global religion of Islam, as discussed earlier, Freemasonry, Theosophy, and nineteenth-century-Pan-Africanism.”⁶⁷

In fact, Noble Drew Ali makes Garvey’s influence known in his *Circle Seven Koran* when he states, “In these modern days there came a forerunner, 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.”⁶⁸ Furthermore, the influence and appropriation of freemasonry within the religious sect is an cultural and strategic strategy to gain membership and appeal to the Black masses. Therefore, some of the freemasonry symbolism such as the fez,

⁶⁵ Turner, *Islam*, 93.

⁶⁶ Turner, *Islam*, 93.

⁶⁷ Turner, *Islam*, 90.

⁶⁸ Ali, *The Holy Koran*, 59.

turban, crescent and star, circle seven, the all-seeing eye, clasped hands, Sphinx of Giza, and pyramids were all used to reach a mass number of African American converts. Richard Turner's work also discussed this strategy of using familiar established organizational symbolism to gain membership: "Ali knew Black freemasonry was a conduit for Eastern religious ideas and rituals and for Pan-Africanist thought, and it was packaged in a form that would appeal to the Black masses."⁶⁹

Ali's strategic compilation of various religions, and symbolism, to create a cohesive whole, proved effective. Ali shrewdly incorporated these familiar religious texts to form his religious sect to introduce the African Americans to a seemingly familiar vision of Islam, a religion with which they previously possessed little more than superficial knowledge of. Ali accomplished this by simply remaking, "the Christian tradition into a form that would teach tenants of Islam."⁷⁰ Ali essentially re-signified the traditions of Black Christianity as part and parcel of a new racial and or religious formation. Merging various religious texts formed Ali's rhetoric approach which made his members comfortable with his *Holy Koran* text, as well as his approaches and ideals pertaining to religious, spiritual, and mystical thought. Ultimately, Ali's intended purpose for this strategic compilation of religious text, was to create a text that appealed to the displaced moors of the early twentieth century. These displaced moors, as Ali referred to African Americans during the early twentieth century, responded well to an easily digestible, short, text that kept their interests. Furthermore, this familiarity and easily digestible material served as the primary factor for Ali's teachings which was, "supplying congregants with a possibly of an emancipatory release from what he posited as the shackles of White Christendom

⁶⁹ Turner, *Islam*, 93

⁷⁰ Scott J. Varda, "Drew Ali and the Moorish Science Temple of America: A Minor Rhetoric of Black Nationalism." *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 16, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 685-718, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.14321/rhetpubaffa.15.4.0685>.

and their own perceived racial inferiority.”⁷¹ In fact, as an added value for this examination, my father points to this very reason when he recalls his reason for joining the Moorish Science Temple of America.

When I interviewed my father as part of this thesis research, I sought to gain a better understanding of what made him join the MSTA. Furthermore, I wanted to better understand if Ali’s text was a contributing factor or did a previous member influence his decision. When I interviewed my father, I was surprised to learn that he was not only aware of the MSTA before he was incarcerated in 2004, but that he began expanding his knowledge on many counter-identity and Black Nationalist movements as a young man. He informed me that, “during my high school years, about tenth grade I took great interest in researching Malcolm X and many Black power organizations that were prominent in the 1960s and 70s.” When I asked why he didn’t join any of organizations that he had read about? He responded, “They weren’t that known in the Cleveland area during the 1990s, and people that I hung around did not necessarily acknowledge alternative groups, especially during this period where crime and other vices were rampant throughout major cities such as ours. We didn’t look toward organizations to solve our problems back then, we tried to solve them ourselves.” After my father was incarcerated in 2004, as he explained, he began to re-read many Black nationalist works and became introduced to various counter-identity groups while in prison. One of the group’s my father examined was the MSTA.

Although, the member that shared his knowledge of the organization did not wear the traditional fez while in prison, he did lend my father the *Circle Seven Koran*, and spoke with him daily about Noble Drew Ali’s message and teachings. When his friend was released from prison,

⁷¹ Varda, “Drew Ali and the Moorish Science Temple”, 692.

and my father a few years after, he met with him and attended an MSTA service. My father subsequently studied many religions and even became a deacon for a non-denominational Christian church. However, after serving as a deacon for about three years my father sought for a more profound, as he explains, intellectual way of life that favored Blacks and embraced a prideful African heritage. A sense of belonging, and identity, was, and remains, a very important factor in his life. My father professes that he found these virtues in the MSTA organization. He attended another service at Branch #7 in East Cleveland and decided to embrace the teachings. Since then, he has received his nationality card declaring his Moroccan nationality and ancestry, and he dons the fez at organizational events. He professes that this way of life fits him more accurately than any other religion or organization that he studied could have. The MSTA's message, outlined earlier, makes complete sense to him and he appreciates the concept of lineage. While there are some aspects of the MSTA that he views as archaic, overall, the group has been a positive experience for my father and has made adjusting to life as a Black man in current day America much easier. One of the main topics of discussion when I interviewed my father was the presentation and rituals during the services that he attends. I have not attended a service as of yet but his explanation of the services that he attends are interesting and has served as a recruitment mechanism. For this reason, a brief explanation of the Moorish Science Temple's religious service will be discussed to further showcase how this organization deals with the concept of their Asiatic identity. Although Ali familiarized himself and incorporated various religious practices into his own text, his services further showcased the distinction between the established religions and his created Islamic sect.

Noble Drew Ali's Moorish temples held, and continue to hold, two services. There is a service held on Friday known as Holy Day or Sabbath; from 7:30 p.m. to 10 p.m. The Sunday

service and proceedings are known as Koran Class and take place from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.⁷² These meeting times were in place before COVID-19 swept the nation. More recent public meetings and services, at least for my father's Temple #7 in Cleveland, OH, are held on Friday, still known as Holy Day; from 7:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Sunday School meetings are scheduled from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.⁷³ MSTA organizations still maintain the traditional standards for their services as Noble Drew Ali had outlined in his *Holy Koran*. According to Arthur H. Fauset who attended the group's services as part of his dissertation research, the Friday service or the Sabbath was simply a reading from the *Holy Koran* led by the leader or Grand Sheik of the temple.

The Sunday service was considered, and still is, the Moorish Americans main day of worship. Based upon Fauset's observations, the Sunday service was a two part-process that began promptly at 5:00 p.m. and ended punctually at 7:00 p.m. This segment of service began with, "the leader of the congregation walking around the temple with questionnaires in his hand from which he asks questions in so low a tone of voice that it is impossible to hear him more than three or four feet away."⁷⁴ The members of the congregation then go about the congregation and begin asking questions the same way amongst each other. After this greeting ritual is finished, the leaders go one by one through the congregation and have the members read one verse from an assigned chapter of the *Holy Koran* aloud. The leader begins to have a sort of casual conversation with the congregation discussing in depth, the *Holy Koran*. During this period the leader takes questions from the congregation and answer lingering concerns. At the

⁷² "Navigation: Subordinate Temples Within the United States," Moorish Science Temple of America, accessed February 13, 2022, <https://www.msta1913.org>

⁷³ "Get Meeting Times: MSTA Cleveland", MSTA National Site, accessed February 16, 2022, <https://www.moorishsciencetempleofamerica.org>

⁷⁴ Fauset, *Black Gods of the Metropolis*, 48-49.

end of service, men and women, elderly and young, children, rise to their feet and wait until the main service to begin at 8 p.m.⁷⁵

The rest of the Sunday service began at 8 p.m. with the leader of the temple, while facing the congregation, begins to chant a hymn softly, and this is taken up by the members of the congregation. This chant is very soft, unlike pastors preaching from the pulpit in the traditional Black Christian churches. The leader, or Sheik, then begins to unfold the program by first reading out of the *Holy Koran* written by Noble Drew Ali. After the selected scripture is read, he reminds the congregation of their ancestral origins, placing great emphasis on being descendants of Moabites and Canaanites, as well as discussing Noble Drew Ali's journey to create the Islamic sect. After the leaders have read and reiterated the teachings of Noble Drew Ali, the elder of the Temple reads the special laws of the temple which hang on the wall. Similar to traditional church services, once the elders are done reading the special laws, members of the congregation come towards the front and testify. This act is intimate to many, which begins with an introduction statement. Their testimony begins with the members saying, "I rise to give, do honor to Allah, and to his Holy Prophet, Noble Drew Ali. Reincarnated, who gave to us this *Holy Koran*."⁷⁶ The testimony is then told, with frequent references being made about the fact the prophet had removed the stigma of color and of race. The Sunday night service concludes with a practice that Ali borrowed from various religious congregations, especially the Black Christian church.

Promptly at 9:30 p.m., several members of the temple move forward with collection plates while quietly chanting a hymn, which is taken up quietly by the members giving their monetary contributions. Further showcasing Southern Christian influence in the Moorish

⁷⁵ Fauset, *Black Gods of the Metropolis*, 48-50.

⁷⁶ Fauset, *Black Gods of the Metropolis*, 49.

temples, are the hymns that are quietly chanted. The most popular hymn that is chanted in most Moorish temples is *Moslem's That old Time Religion*. This hymn is simply a transformation of the popular Black church spiritual *Gimme That old Time Religion* which was a song and staple of many Black Southern Christian churches.⁷⁷ The term Moslem is used by Moorish Americans to basically further differentiate their Islamic beliefs from that of the African American Muslims that were situated in the United States during the early twentieth century. Although many temples in current day attempt to adhere to Ali's standard services times, many temples created their own times for Sunday service. These rituals and practices that took place during the Sunday service were intentionally created to be distinct from that of the Christian church and to more properly establish the Asiatic identity within the American framework.

The Black Christian church includes a pastor, and or preacher, typically yelling from a pulpit. In contrast to this, Ali's services held at his Moorish Science temples featured quiet, low speaking, and approachable leaders. What further differentiated the Moorish Americans from Black Christians were the holidays that Ali implemented, and the Moslems followed diligently. The initial holiday that was observed on January 5th by the Islamic sect was titled Christmas. This holiday is simply classified as, "the anniversary of the day when the prophet, Noble Drew Ali, was reincarnated"; or given the wisdom to become a reincarnation of Mohammed.⁷⁸ The comparison section of the thesis, featured later, includes a discussion of the current status of Moorish Americans. This section with a discussion of the death of Noble Drew Ali and how it affected the subsequent history of the Moorish Science Temple of America.

⁷⁷ Varda, "Drew Ali and the Moorish Science Temple", 698.

⁷⁸ Fauset, Black God of The Metropolis, 51.

The mysterious death of Noble Drew Ali in 1929 left the Islamic sect in a state of extreme limbo. During 1929 Ali's leadership was once again challenged. Former business manager of the main temple in Chicago, Temple No. 1, Claude Greene, split with the Moorish Science Temple of America declaring himself Grand Sheik, with many members accepting him as the national leader. This challenge to Ali's leadership eventually ended in Greene's death. The small-time politician, and former butler, was shot and stabbed in his new offices at the Unity Club in Chicago on the night of March 15, 1929. Suspecting that the murder was ordered by Noble Drew Ali, Ali was arrested. While awaiting trial, Ali sent what would be his last message to his devoted followers. He shared words of wisdom, reminding his followers to remember his teachings and keep their faith. Some of the more significant words of this message were, "I go to bat on Monday, May 20, before the Grand Jury. If you are with me, be there. Hold on and keep faith, and great shall be your reward. Remember my laws and love ye one another. Prefer not a stranger to your brother. Love and truth and my peace I leave you all."⁷⁹ Ali was released on bond a few weeks later, and then died under mysterious circumstances. Many of his followers believe that he died from his injuries obtained by undocumented police beating that occurred while he was in police custody. Others, however, suggest that he was killed by followers of the murdered Claude Greene.⁸⁰ In any event, the Moorish Science Temple's influence on the Black communities reached peak popularity in the early years of the Great Migration up until the Great Depression but failed to maintain a dominate grasp on the counter-identity culture afterwards.

Although, counter-identity movements, overall, have historically experienced low percentages of membership within the African American population, Noble Drew Ali's movement did make a significant impact. The largest reported membership was around thirty

⁷⁹ Arna Bontemps, Jack Conroy, *They Seek a City* (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1945), 177.

⁸⁰ Essien-Udom, *Black nationalism*, 35.

thousand, during the early twentieth century. This may seem low in comparison to modern organizations that have larger memberships and a substantial social media presence. However, the Moorish Science Temple of America represents one of the first organization that offered Blacks a prideful identity that was grounded in an African/and or Asiatic, lineage. This early form of Pan-Africanism, and Black Nationalism broke the mold for Black responses to White racism. Blacks fleeing the Jim Crow South during the early twentieth century were provided an opportunity to intellectually combat the racism that resided in the Southern states, as well as in the Northern cities. This organization is significant for its methods in dealing with the issue of Black identity during early twentieth century America. This organization's main principles of love, truth, peace, freedom, and justice resonated with many Blacks who became members, including my father. During the Moorish Science Temple's period of peak popularity there was another counter-identity organization, Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, that rose to even greater prominence and visibility. Garvey's political and economic message would ultimately attract millions of followers.

CHAPTER 4

MARCUS GARVEY'S UNIA

While Noble Drew Ali and his Moors were attracting attention and gaining small percentages of membership in various Black metropolises by 1913, Marcus Garvey was in the planning phase to publicize his own counter-identity movement. Before he would introduce his organization to the American masses in 1916, with a keen focus on recruiting Blacks, the early stages of his movement began in Kingston, Jamaica. However, one of Garvey's greatest motivations for forming the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) came during his travels; especially in 1913 while he worked and studied in London. According to political scientist Rupert Lewis, while in London, Garvey worked around the docks, and claimed to have studied law and philosophy. Along with this dual role, he also worked for Egyptian journalist Duse Mohammad Ali's publication the *African Times and Orient Review*.⁸¹

This newspaper was circulated in Jamaica and Kingston where it was distributed through the offices of the *Jamaica Times* and advertised in the *Jamaica Times* as well. Garvey's position as a contributing writer for the *African Times and Orient Review* influenced his later movement. In 1913, Garvey developed an anti-colonial perspective with regard to Jamaica and first publicized this stance in the October issue of the *African Times and Orient Review* in his article entitled "The British West Indies in the Mirror of Civilization." Garvey concluded in his article stating: "As one who knows the people well, I make no apology for prophesying that there will soon be a turning point in the history of the West Indies; and that the people who inhabit that portion of the Western Hemisphere will be the instruments of uniting a scattered race who, before the close of many centuries, will found an Empire on which the sun shall shine as

⁸¹ Rupert Lewis, *Marcus Garvey: Anti-Colonial Champion* (Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc, 1988), 46.

ceaselessly as it shines on the Empire of the North today.”⁸² This chapter will examine Garvey’s upbringing and his early formation of the UNIA. It will showcase how Garvey’s upbringings and experiences influenced his response to racism, specifically, his desire to form a counter-identity movement.

It is important to note that Marcus Garvey was born into a period where African nationalism was in decline and greatly discouraged. In fact, when he was born on August 17, 1887 in Saint Ann’s Bay, Jamaica, the so-called scramble for Africa, and/or New Imperialism, was in full swing and it became dangerous to oppose European colonization. During this period, all of the African nationalists who opposed European colonialism were being killed or sent into permanent exile. Moreover, during the same period that European nations met at Berlin conference to split up the African continent among themselves, Blacks, especially in the American South were dealing with the failures of Reconstruction.

Garvey’s father who was a master stone mason and a deacon of the Methodist Church was regarded as a village lawyer and had great influence on his son. His father would settle disputes, write letters, and give advice to the peasants in their small sea-port town of Saint Ann, Jamaica. Garvey’s father, Garvey Sr, was described by his son and wife Sarah Jane Richards as, “severe, firm, determined, bold and strong, refusing to yield even to superior forces if he believed he was right.”⁸³ These attributes would be apparent in Marcus Garvey’s later leadership style in the United States. At the age of fourteen, Garvey experienced his first act of racism. Being an excellent pupil from infant school to elementary up until his last days of his formal education he was especially friendly with the White children who lived on the adjoining

⁸² Marcus Garvey, “The British West Indies in the Mirror of Civilization,” *African Times and Orient Review*, October 11, 1913, 82.

⁸³ Lewis, *Marcus Garvey*, 17.

property. Since Garvey was afforded a private tuition from his godfather, Mr. Alfred Burrowes, he frequently interacted with White children. However, it was when he was fourteen, that his first brush with racism drastically altered his viewpoint of racial prejudice and separation. He recounts in his autobiography describing this incident with the White Wesleyan minister, Pastor Lightbourne's children: "We romped and were happy children, playmates together. The little white girl whom I liked knew no better than I did myself. We were two innocent fools who never dreamed of a race feeling and problem. As a child I went to school with white boys and girls, like all other Negroes then. I never heard the term used once until I was about fourteen. At fourteen my little white playmate and I parted. Her parents thought that the time had come to separate us and draw the colour line. They sent her and another sister to Edinburgh, Scotland, and told her that she was never to write or try to get in touch with me, for I was a nigger."⁸⁴ This incident was significant for the trajectory of Garvey's later movement because it seemed to have instilled a revolutionary spirit in him that would be quickly displayed on a local level.

By 1906, after Garvey had experienced his first act of prejudice by his own neighbors, he had not only begun to notice that the British colonialism suppressed the Black population in Jamaica, but it was also during this period that he abandoned formal education for a specialized vocational skill. Although Garvey was above average in primary school and like so many West Indian students received private lessons, he did not go on to pursue secondary education. He was lucky in a sense that he had full access to his father's library that would serve as a replacement for formal education.⁸⁵ The exact reason for Garvey's departure from a formal education are many, but a few may very well be the prime factors for his premature exodus. Many historians

⁸⁴ Lewis, *Marcus Garvey*, 20.

⁸⁵ Tony Martin, *Marcus Garvey, Hero: A First Biography* (Massachusetts: The Majority Press, 1983), 10.

have agreed that Garvey's position as a printer's apprentice may have been a contributing factor. According to Rupert Lewis, in 1901 when Garvey was fourteen, he became a printer's apprentice under his godfather Mr. Burrowes. By 1903 he dropped out of school, quickly mastering the trade, learning, "on a heavy iron foot-pedal machine."⁸⁶ This route of an apprenticeship rather than formal education was common in the West Indies, as it was in early twentieth century America. In fact, many West Indies citizens during this period never had the opportunity to read and write mainly due to poor health, lack of facilities, and of course lack of funds, because "their parents' need of practical help at home, in the fields, and at market, or because of the limited perspective of uneducated parents who felt that nothing practical was to be gained by irrelevant brainwork. After all, one was slated to be a cowhand, or laborer, a blacksmith or shoemaker."⁸⁷ Another possible theory, or a compilation of them all, as to why Garvey abandoned secondary school was its emphasis on promoting British rule. Consequently, formally educated children in the West Indies learned more about British and Imperial achievements than the Caribbean, in which they were situated, or of their African ancestors.

Lewis includes a similar explanation in his work describing the British education system in Jamaica when he states, "School-children were taught to accept British rule and love it. There were pictures of the British sovereign in all schools; the children sang the British national anthem and British songs and were taught to revere the Governor of the island who represented the British crown."⁸⁸ While Garvey self-taught himself through books from his father's library and worked as a printer's apprentice, he began taking a stance against European colonialism. His

⁸⁶ Lewis, *Marcus Garvey*, 21.

⁸⁷ Lewis, *Marcus Garvey*, 22.

⁸⁸ Lewis, *Marcus Garvey*, 22.

involvement in the unsuccessful 1907 Printer's Union Strike in Jamaica would set the stage for his future activities.

After the strike, Garvey went to work for the Government Printing Office. In his spare time, Garvey produced his first publication *The Watchman* in 1909.⁸⁹ With an audience, even a small one, Garvey was now able to reach many with his message and political agenda of anti-imperialism and Black nationalism, a political strategy that he would mimic in the United States. Lewis also asserts that it was during his early political activities that Garvey participated in the campaigns of two politicians, H.A.L. Simpson and Jacob Wareham.⁹⁰ Additionally, it was during this period where Garvey's introduction to anti-colonial politics began. He was elected as a secretary of the National Club of Kingston in 1910. This organization is considered an early nationalist group in Jamaica that fearlessly opposed the colonial government in Kingston, advocated for the redemption of the lower-class and professed doctrine similar to Garvey's role model, the radical journalist, Dr. Robert Love.⁹¹ Moreover, during his travels to Central America from 1910 to 1911 Garvey recognized the conditions of Blacks outside of Jamaica. In fact, Garvey first travelled to Costa Rica finding work as a timekeeper on a plantation. In this poor and exploited country, he observed the conditions of the Black workers and started an effort to improve their circumstances. When he became outraged by the conditions faced by the Black migrant workers, Lewis asserts that he protested to the British Counsel but was told, "that nothing can be done by him as Counsel; he could not change conditions in Costa Rica."⁹² It was from this experience that Garvey learned his first lesson about the arrogant stubbornness of a

⁸⁹ Lewis, *Marcus Garvey*, 42.

⁹⁰ Lewis, *Marcus Garvey*, 44.

⁹¹ Lewis, *Marcus Garvey*, 42.

⁹² Lewis, *Marcus Garvey*, 44.

European colonial power.⁹³ Garvey also worked as an editor of a local newspaper in Costa Rica called *La Nacion*.

From Costa Rica Garvey then traveled to Bocas del Toro in Panama, where he witnessed various racist acts inflicted upon Blacks that further ignited his political flame. While in Panama, he became involved in a newspaper called *La Prensa* fulfilling the role as an editor and contributing writer. According to Garvey's wife, Amy J. Garvey, along with these travels, from 1910 to 1911 he also travelled to the countries of Guatemala, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Chile, and Peru.⁹⁴ At this stage in his life Garvey was developing his agenda on anti-imperialism, as well as experiencing a great sense of political agitation as he travelled throughout these locations looking for work. These experiences influenced Garvey's developing political philosophy that he expressed in the newspapers that he edited, and they prepared him for his position with the London-based *African Times and Orient Review*. His experiences in London would represent his final travel before he formed the UNIA back in Kingston.

While living and working in London, Garvey expressed and developed his political agenda through the pages of the *African Times and Orient Review*. During his two years in London, 1912 to 1914, he attended lectures at Birbeck College, met people from other parts of the empire, and was even able to meet English working people and gain a better understanding of the political realities at the center of the British empire. When Garvey recounted his first experience in London twenty years later, he recalls: "We of ourselves, who are not coloured but Black, found no difficulty in securing lodgings. We secured lodgings not only in London but the different cities we visited, as also in different places in Scotland. We were even offered

⁹³ Amy Jacques Garvey, *Garvey and Garveyism* (New York: Octagon Books, 1986), viii.

⁹⁴ Garvey, *Garvey and Garveyism*, 10.

employment during the time; however, when we made our third visit in 1928, we were astounded to be confronted with a pronounced prejudice that shocked our concept of things English.”⁹⁵

When Marcus Garvey returned to Jamaica in 1914, he was ready to create a movement of his own design. His early grass-roots version of the UNIA in Kingston expressed anti-imperialism sentiments and sought to promote an awakening of African peoples in Africa and the African diaspora. Moreover, Garvey believed a recognized shared identity must be created amongst these people to bring about Pan-Africanism culture and pride. When this movement made its way to the United States it became extremely popular during a period when African Americans were migrating and expressing themselves through the arts. Harlem, New York served as the United States headquarters for this start-up movement.

Garvey’s experiences from 1910 to 1914 travelling to various locations prompted him to arrive at certain conclusions as he left London by boat back to Jamaica in 1914. The experiences associated with his extensive travels, in fact, were the prime reasons for the formation of the UNIA. Years later, Garvey assessed this period by noting “becoming naturally restless for the opportunity of doing something for the advancement of my race, I was determined that the Black man would not continue to be kicked about by all the other races and nations of the world, as I saw it in the West Indies, South and Central America, and Europe, and as I read in America. My young and ambitious mind led me into flights of great imagination. I saw before me then, even as I do now, a new world of Black men, not peons, serfs, dogs, and slaves but a nation of sturdy men making their impress upon civilization and causing a new light to dawn upon the human race.”⁹⁶ This hindsight reflection and his vision of a new world of Black men resulted in the

⁹⁵ Robert Hill, “The First English Years and After, 1912-1916,” *Negro Thought and Opinion 1933-1939*, October 1975, 38-70.

⁹⁶ Robert A. Hill, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers: Volume 1 1826-August 1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 153.

formation of the UNIA. Within five days of arriving in Kingston on July 7, Garvey took on the role of enticing sceptics to his banner.⁹⁷ Thus, the Universal Negro Improvement and Conservation Association, UNIA and African Communities League, ACL, was officially launched and actively recruiting on August 1, 1914. It was significant that the organization was launched on this day because it represented Emancipation Day, which, according to Rupert Lewis, had been historically celebrated as the day marking freedom from slavery in the British Caribbean colonies. This day has always served as great social, cultural, and political significance to the Jamaican peoples, as well as held profound meaning to not only Garvey but his role model Dr. Robert Love.⁹⁸ Dr. Love's influence will be discussed later alongside Garvey's political and social philosophies. In any event, Garvey rallied men that he had met on his travels, and some he had known previously in Jamaica. Assisting Garvey in the formation of the early UNIA were many high-spirited men; "Enos J. Soly, Garvey's friend from his Government Printing Office days; Richard A. Scarlett, a shopkeeper from Port Maria, who Garvey met during his Port Maria stay when Scarlett and Cottrell, Garvey's printer friend, shared lodgings; Dawson, an hotelier of Princess Street, Kingston; W.A. Campbell, printer/civil servant, later to become a Postmaster General, and Archdeacon Graham of Port Maria who, though never a UNIA member was a firm supporter and encourager."⁹⁹

Early on, these men would frequent Mr. Dawson's hotel where they would hold meetings, discuss recruiting strategies and most importantly talk about how to improve their organizational influence. With every movement, a message and or agenda must be established for its members to rally around. These founding members had to formulate a message that would

⁹⁷ Colin Grant, *Negro With a hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* (London: Oxford University Press, 2008), 53.

⁹⁸ Lewis, *Marcus Garvey*, 48.

⁹⁹ Lewis, *Marcus Garvey*, 49.

reach the Blacks of the African diaspora. This mission was bold, but Garvey's political exposures in the many countries that he visited fueled him to take a distinct stance against racism and deal with the issue of identity during this period. The first UNIA office that was established in 1914 was set up at Charles Street, West of Chancery Lane in Kingston, Jamaica. The initial officers in Jamaica were as such: Garvey served as president, Adrian A. Daily Secretary, while the corresponding Secretary was Amy Ashwood whom Garvey had met in July of that year and later marry in December of 1919. During the years from 1914 to 1916 Garvey and his organization's officers struggled greatly to unite Jamaicans to a consciousness of race. Garvey had aims and objectives for his organization that his wife Amy properly documents in her work, recounting her husband's organization and its significance.

One of Garvey's early objectives after returning to Jamaica was: "To establish a Universal Confraternity among the race; to promote the spirit of pride and love; to reclaim the fallen; to administer to and assist the needy; to assist in civilizing the backward tribes of Africa; to assist in the development of Independent Negro nations and communities; to establish a central nation for the race, where they will be given the opportunity to develop themselves; to establish Commissaries and Agencies in the principal countries and cities of the world for the representation of all Negroes."¹⁰⁰

Unfortunately, Garvey was unable to recruit a large number of followers in Jamaica. His early doctrine of ant-imperialism did not resonate with educated well-off Blacks. Historically, they had purposely ignored the plight of the Black masses in their country. They did this because well-off Blacks were accepted into the society of the Whites, and their ambitions lay in lifting the color-line in their communities. This meant that when they earned a certain amount of money

¹⁰⁰ Garvey, *Garvey and Garveyism*, 11.

and education, they encouraged their children to marry White or near White. This method was practiced by many educated Blacks in Jamaica to ensure that their children would be accepted into society, earn better jobs and business opportunities.

Jamaica's Black elite viewed this mindset as being socially and economically expedient. However, Garvey attempted to warn them about this manufactured skin bias and to showcase, that "outside the shores of the islands they were classified and treated as belonging to a poor, rejected race."¹⁰¹ Many of Garvey's early messages included these sentiments, and included topics of prejudice based on class which he viewed as an English institution. One early UNIA objective that sought to unite the interests of Jamaica's Black elite and Black masses was the desire "to establish educational and industrial colleges for the further education and culture if our boys and girls. To reclaim the fallen and degraded, especially the criminal class, and help them to a state of good citizenship. To administer to and assist the needy. To promote a better taste for commerce and industry. To promote a universal confraternity and strengthen the bonds of brotherhood and unity among the races. To help generally in the development if the country."¹⁰² Unfortunately, for Garvey, such proclamations failed to attract more educated or lower-class Jamaican Blacks to the UNIA. Also, during this time, Garvey began to correspond with Booker T. Washington. In fact, Garvey wanted to visit Washington and his Tuskegee Institute explaining to him in a letter in April of 1915 that he was, "expecting to leave for America between May and June and I shall be calling on you. I intend to do most of my public speaking in the South among the people of our race."¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Garvey, *Garvey and Garveyism*, 13.

¹⁰² Hill, *The Marcus Garvey*, 60.

¹⁰³ Daniel T. Williams, *The Perilous Road of Marcus Garvey: A Bibliography* (Alabama: Tuskegee Institute, 1969), 32.

This meeting would never happen because of Garvey's delayed travel until March 1916, and Washington's death in November 1915. However, Garvey still travelled to the United States to seek aid to build a Jamaica Tuskegee, which would mirror Washington's program that promoted Black business and education. Ultimately, he would remain in the United States until his deportation in 1927, primarily in Harlem, New York. It must be noted that Garvey's political program shifted drastically once he had established his UNIA in Harlem. Not gaining an audience in the United States until the end of World War I, Garvey's UNIA agenda shifted from a reformist one as seen in Jamaica, to one of militant Black nationalism. In New York, Garvey developed an international perspective that sought to provide an answer to the issue of African American identity.

When Garvey landed in the United States in 1916, he quickly began taking the appropriate measures to establishing his UNIA in the American framework. In fact, by 1917 Garvey had become so immersed in the New York branch of the UNIA that the Kingston headquarters had simply become an outpost. Although, the first months of Garvey's journey in America were not lucrative, forcing him to work and live as a printer in Harlem, he was not discouraged. Furthermore, early in 1917 Garvey began to actively convey his message of racial accomplishment.

In January of 1917 Garvey wrote an article in *Champion Magazine* which included the following:

The acme of American Negro enterprise is not yet reached. You have still a far way to go. You want more stores, more banks, and bigger enterprises. I hope that your powerful Negroes press and the conscientious element among your leaders will continue to inspire you to achieve; I have detected during my short stay, that even among you there are leaders who are false, who are mere-self-seekers, but on the other hand, I am pleased to find good men and, too, those who fight for the uplift of the race is one of life and death. In New York, I have met John E. Bruce, a man for whom I have the strongest regard

inasmuch as I have seen in him a true Negro, a man who does not talk simply because he is in position for which he must say or do something, but who feels honored to be a member. I can also place in this category Dr. R.R. Wright, Jr., Dr. Parks, vice-president of the Baptist Union and Dr. Triley of the M.E. church of Philadelphia, the Rev. J.C. Anderson of Quinn Chapel, AME Church, and Mrs. Ida B. Wells-Barnett of Chicago.¹⁰⁴

From this early publication, it is clear that Garvey was not only calling Negroes to action for self-determination and self-efficiency, by way of economic advancement, but that he had already established strong relationships with the Black church figures, political activists, and Black business leaders of the early twentieth century. As his movement began to grow in size and influence, he relied on these relationships to further his organization.

By 1918, Garvey's interest in Black economic self-determination enhanced his movement's popularity going into the 1920s. Also, Garvey sought to create a philosophy that would cover every aspect of African American life in an attempt to gain mass membership and establish a universal identity for Blacks situated throughout the world. Some of Garvey's early opinions and philosophy related to the issue of Black identity in the United States, linked with what he had witnessed in Harlem, were expressed in various UNIA pamphlets and programs. For instance, "Prejudice of the white race against the black race is not so much because of color as of condition; because as a race, to them, we have accomplished nothing; we have built no nation, no government, because we are dependent for our economic and political existence. Prejudice can be actuated by different reasons. Sometimes, the reason is economic, and sometimes political. You can only obstruct it by progress and force."¹⁰⁵ One of his strongest opinions focused on the term radicalism. In regard to this concept Garvey declared, "Radical is a label that is always

¹⁰⁴ Marcus Garvey Jr, "West Indies in the Mirror of Truth", *Champion Magazine: A Monthly Survey of Negro Advancement* (Jan 1917): 167-68.

¹⁰⁵ Amy Jacques-Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1992), 18.

applied to people who are endeavoring to get freedom. Jesus Christ was the greatest radical the world ever saw. He came and saw the world of sin and his program was to inspire it with spiritual feeling. He was therefore a radical.”¹⁰⁶

Marcus Garvey also expressed his views regarding leadership. For example, present and future leaders of the UNIA were expected to conform with the following: “A leader must have personality; he must be clean cut in his appearance so as not to be criticized. An untidy leader is always a failure. He must be neatly dressed, and his general appearance must be clean and presentable because people are supposed to follow him in his manner, behavior and conduct. Furthermore, leaders must be self-possessed, confident, feeling self-reliant. When your followers see that self-confidence, they will believe in you and follow you.”¹⁰⁷ The more radical expectations for his leaders that were expressed by Garvey included: “The idea of the U.N.I.A. is to unite into one race all the shades of color and build up a standard race. You should discourage intermarriage between white and Black and Blacks and other races. You should tell the people that it is an honor to be Black and that nothing is wrong with the Black skin but bad conditions. Tell them that a well-kept Black woman or Black man is as good as a well-kept white man or woman.”¹⁰⁸ It is apparent from this passage that Garvey expressed separatist tendencies, which essentially categorized the UNIA as a nation within a nation. Moreover, Garvey took this separatist ideology and or philosophy a step further when he listed his aims and objectives for the United States UNIA.

The main objectives that were the cornerstones of his organization in America were:

¹⁰⁶ Jacques-Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions*, 18.

¹⁰⁷ Marcus Garvey, Tony Martin, *Message to the People: The Course of African Philosophy* (Massachusetts: The Majority Press, 1986), 19-21.

¹⁰⁸ Garvey and Martin, *Message to the People*, 23.

5. *To assist in civilizing the backward tribes of Africa.* Africa is the motherland of all Negroes. All Negroes were taken from Africa against their will and forced into slavery. Africa is the natural home of the race. One day all Negroes hope to look to Africa as a land of their vine and fig tree. Therefore, it is necessary to help the tribes that live in Africa to advance to a higher state of civilization. The white man is not conscientiously doing it, although he professes to do so. This is only his method of deceiving the world. It is the Negro who must help the Negro. To help the African Negro to achieve civilization is to prepare him for his place in a new African state that will be the home of all Negroes.

6. *To assist in the development of independent Negro nations and communities.* The Negro should develop every section of the communities in which he lives that is his, so that he may control every section or part of that community. He should segregate himself residentially in that community so as to have political power, economic power a social power in the community.

7. To establish commissioners or agencies in the principal countries and cities of the world for the representation and protection of all Negroes, irrespective of nationality. This means that there must be someone in every city whose business it will be to look after the interest of Negroes who may come into that city or country. His position will be like that of an ambassador, consul, or consular agent of the nation. He will interest himself in all the things affecting the Negro race and see to it that no advantage or abuse is taken or made of a Negro who comes into the city or country. He is to report all happenings affecting the Negro; and those happenings in which the Negro interested, to the U.N.I.A. This will not be necessary where Negroes have a community of their own, but is applicable to only to foreign countries, such as Europe, Asia, and South America, where the Negro may live in large numbers and have no contact with the government.¹⁰⁹

As seen earlier with Noble Drew Ali, and what becomes apparent when observing Garvey's aims of the American UNIA, is that he sought to take advantage of Black migration patterns to grown UNIA membership. To accomplish this, Garvey established various institutions within his movement that would cater to the needs of transplanted Southern Blacks, as well as other persons of African descent in America and around the world. Specifically, Garvey sought to attract followers through his movement's emphasis on economics, political representation, and a strong sense of religion via the Black AME church.

¹⁰⁹ Garvey and Martin, *Message to the People*, 29-31.

From the economic standpoint Garvey would establish businesses that proved somewhat profitable and were seen as an influential representation of the UNIA movement. Many of his businesses ultimately failed due to poor management and his deportation. One of Garvey's most significant ventures was *The Negro World* newspaper, founded in 1918. One of the early issues of *The Negro World* featured an article entitled "Negroes at Versailles". Published in November 1918, it featured a call to action from Blacks in Harlem where Garvey stated, "The time has come for us to unite. All other races are doing it. On Sunday night the assembled people will elect three delegates of the race to represent our interests at the Peace Conference in France. Every oppressed group of people will be represented in some way or other at the Peace Conference. Remember, men, the time is now. There must be liberty, justice and equality, and that can only be when the Negro takes proper steps to make his power felt."¹¹⁰ *The Negro World Press* served as an outlet for recruitment, and as a tool to distribute Garvey's ideology to a mass population of Blacks around the world. However, this business venture did experience vast difficulties early on.

After six months of circulation, despite financial backings from some Black businesspeople, Garvey was forced to seek donations to keep the newspaper afloat. He used *The Negro World* to generate donations through a March 1, 1919 article entitled "Fund Raising Appeal". Garvey told his readers: "for six months the Association has been publishing this paper at a great financial loss. We started out with a circulation of three thousand copies a week, and today we are in the neighborhood of fifty thousand. This paper stands for an ideal and not for commercial greed or profit. Because of that we have refused to carry certain advertisements that

¹¹⁰ Marcus Garvey, "Negroes at Versailles," *The Negro World Vol. 1 No. 16*, November 30, 1918, 1.

would in any way libel the reputation of the race.”¹¹¹ The newspaper would remain in circulation until 1933. Garvey also attempted to establish a Black owned steamship company to streamline imports that were totally controlled and operated by Blacks. This business would be another example of Garvey’s poorly managed enterprises. Nonetheless, its vision and scope inspired Black owned businesses for generations after its discontinuation. The Black Star Line was established in 1919 with Garvey’s idea of an, “an-Negro steamship company that would link the coloured peoples of the world in commercial and industrial intercourse.”¹¹² Paired with this steamship company Garvey also launched the Negro Factories Corporation. This enterprise, the NFC, served as an umbrella company that would spawn multiple Black owned businesses that enhanced the African American image during the 1920s while Harlem was going through its artistic renaissance. African American entrepreneurship in Northern cities expanded during this period, and it is safe to conclude that Garvey influenced this development.

Along with this strong interest in business, Garvey also possessed a strong interest in politics. In fact, in contrast to Noble Drew Ali, Garvey felt that Black participation in politics would result in a government that acknowledged the struggles and plights of their people. For instance, Garvey once stated; “Always try to know the mayor of your city and the government of your state, island, or country. Try to know the government officials also. To know them before you have trouble is to get help when you are in trouble, not to know them is to be at a disadvantage when you are brought before them. Always treat them courteously and friendly even if you don’t mean it. Always let them believe you are friendly.”¹¹³ In the end, Garvey

¹¹¹ Marcus Garvey, “Fund Raising Appeal,” *The Negro World*, March 1, 1919, 1.

¹¹² E.D. Cronon, *Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 50.

¹¹³ Garvey and Martin, *Message to the People*, 72.

believed that Blacks must participate in their local politics so they could gain proper representation and avoid the Southern political corruption that many of them had fled.

The final and most vital cornerstone to Garvey's organization was religion. Of course, the presence of an established religion not only gave the counter-identity movement a sense of validity, but it also provided the allure of a divine cause. In fact, Garvey tenaciously clung to a Judeo-Christian tradition in developing a theology for Black people, in a great attempt to gain membership. This tactic would also prove effective with the idea of a civil religion serving as the main component and organizational structure of the UNIA and the philosophy of Garveyism.¹¹⁴ Some of the more common ideas of God professed by Garvey include: "We Negroes believe in the God of Ethiopia, the everlasting God, God the father, God the son and God the holy ghost, the one God of all ages. That is the God in whom we believe, but we shall worship him through the spectacles of Ethiopia."¹¹⁵ When he spoke of anthropology and a Black man's relation to God Garvey's sense of a civil religion is apparent when he stated, "Do you know what it is to be a man? To be a man is to bear the semblance of my creator, the image of my creator, then you realize that you are a man. Man is supreme lord, the supreme master of the world."¹¹⁶ Similar to Noble Drew Ali, Marcus Garvey manufactured an anthropology that called for Black pride.

Garvey's notion of civil religion closely aligned the doctrine of many pre-existing Black churches, especially the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. Consequently, it was not coincidental that the UNIA viewed the AME church as a vital component to the redemption of Africa and an intricate part of the Black community in the United States. In fact, the close relationship between the AME church and the UNIA was formed early on in Garvey's American

¹¹⁴ Randall K. Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement: The Institutionalization of a Black Civil Religion* (New Jersey: The Scarecrow Inc, 1978), xxiii.

¹¹⁵ Jacques-Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions*, 44.

¹¹⁶ Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religion*, 56.

experience. This relationship began in February 1920 when Garvey gave a speech to the Bishop's Council to the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Later at the same meeting, the president of Wilberforce College, Reverend John A. Gregg, addressed the audience on the topic of redeeming Africa and expressed the AME church's responsibility in that regard. Gregg subsequently approached the UNIA seeking a partnership since the AME church had a unique role as, "a chosen instrument of God for the Christianization first of Negroes of America, and then all of Africa."¹¹⁷

Garvey would later use his relationship with the AME church, an established Christian denomination, to increase UNIA membership. In fact, many AME members and high-ranking clergymen such as: Richard R. Wright Sr, his son, William Henry Heard, and William Henry Ferris would join the UNIA.¹¹⁸ Moreover, UNIA meetings had the characteristics of a religious service and in many ways mimicked that of the MSTA's services. According to historian Randall Burkett, this religious aspect of Garvey's organization was present during special rallies held in Madison Square garden, and at his Sunday services held at his Harlem Liberty Hall, and at local chapter meetings throughout the United States and the Caribbean. Burkett offered the following description of a UNIA special meeting: "The festivities opened with a colorful procession of officers of the Association and a parade of units from the numerous auxiliary organizations of the UNIA, including the Black Cross Nurses, the Royal Guards, the Royal Engineering Corps, the Royal Medical Corps, and the Universal African Eternal Light, one of the official hymns used by the Association. It had been written by the bandmaster of the UNIA, Rabbi Arnold J. Ford. The Chaplain-General offered a prayer, which was followed by an elaborate and carefully

¹¹⁷ Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religion*, 134.

¹¹⁸ Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religion*, 134-136.

selected musical program. First the UNIA band played a march and the UNIA choir offered the Gloria.”¹¹⁹ Sunday services offered a similar experience but less dramatic. They primarily focused on biblical text and teachings, along with selections from the choir. These local UNIA meetings, and or services, were usually held on Sunday evenings, although some chapters preferred mornings. Meetings that were usually under the leadership of a Chaplain-president, Vice-Chaplain president, or preacher.¹²⁰

The UNIA was structured by its religious tenet, referring to members of their High Executive Council as Chaplin-Generals, with each chapter or division naming a chaplain, preacher, and rank-and-file members. The organizational structure, the parades, special meetings, demonstrations, along with the doctrine of Black pride reached many Blacks during the early twentieth century. Furthermore, with Garvey serving as the face of Harlem where Black progress was prominent, membership and eventual expansion came quickly. The exact number UNIA followers is unknown mainly due to Garvey’s constant exaggeration of his organization’s size. However, it is speculated and accepted by many scholars that by the mid-1920s it boasted approximately, “1,200 branches in over 40 countries.”¹²¹ Early member John Charles Zampty, better known as Padre, who during his tenure with the UNIA occupied many positions such as Chaplain-General, stated that, “The UNIA had 1,800 registered divisions around the world and within these 1,800 divisions, the membership totaled about six million people. The largest membership was located in New York City.”¹²²

¹¹⁹ Garvey, *Garvey and Garveyism*, 49.

¹²⁰ Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religion*, 23.

¹²¹ Martin, *The Pan-African Connection*, 59.

¹²² Jeannette Smith-Irvin, *Marcus Garvey’s Footsoldiers: Footsoldiers of the Universal Negro Improvement Association in Their Own Words* (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1988), 9.

While UNIA membership numbers are difficult to validate, the organization's impact is certain. Garvey's counter-identity movement inspired Black intellectual thought and Black nationalism. His movement included members such as Malcolm X's father, who was an UNIA pastor, Earl Little, and possibly the eventual leader of the Nation of Islam Elijah Poole. In fact, Zampty mentions this potential membership in Smith-Irvin's work when he states, "I have to give credit to Elijah Poole of the Nation of Islam. He was a good member of the UNIA and worked for many years, and when he came in contact with Fared, Poole left Detroit."¹²³ This allegation is called into question considering the fact that Elijah Poole makes no mention of his allegiance to the UNIA. In any event, Garvey's counter-identity movement offered a sense of Black pride during the early twentieth century.

Even after his deportation in 1927 the movement continued to be active in the United States as well as other countries. However, the UNIA was unable to gain the membership and popularity that it had during the 1920s. Garvey eventually attempted to form another movement back in Jamaica, but it was not as successful as the UNIA. Many criticisms have been made of Garvey's ideologies, his UNIA movement, and his rivalry with W.E.B. DuBois. These fundamental criticisms have not and will not be expounded upon in this thesis, mainly because their many disagreements regarding the issue of organizing Blacks in the United States may be better served for future research on Black Nationalism. Furthermore, dedicating an entire section of this thesis to the historical criticisms of Marcus Garvey and his UNIA, may greatly divert the reader, future researcher, and modern-day activist from the importance of the leader's influence on many movements that followed. What Garvey created cannot be duplicated. His vision of establishing a self-determined, and self-sustained Black nation within the American framework

¹²³ Smith-Irvin, *Marcus Garvey's Footsoldiers*, 49.

inspired the next generations of social movements including the Black Power Movement, Civil Rights Movement and even the modern social movements such as Black Lives Matter.

CHAPTER 5

FARD'S VISION OF A NATION

The deportation of Marcus Garvey created a void for the Black counter-identity movement in the United States. Certainly, established fraternal organizations such as the Odd Fellows, and the Prince Hall Masons were still relevant during the 1920s, but for many inter-war Blacks who would seek a more permanent alternative lifestyle, no prominent organization outside of the MSTA, had earned their attention. Garvey's deportation in 1927, and Noble Drew Ali's untimely death in 1929, left many Blacks who may have shared their counter-identity or Black nationalist sentiments without a known leader or ideology to follow. In this setting, an individual known as Wallace Fard Muhammad would take the idea of Black pride and counter-identity movements a step further. What the future leader envisioned was a nation. Fard's vision of a nation reflected a separatist ideology that attracted relatively few Blacks early on. However, within a few decades, during the ascendancy of the influential Malcolm X, Fard's Nation of Islam gained greater currency.

It is important to recognize the apparent similarities between the Nation of Islam and Noble Drew Ali's Moorish Science Temple of America. In fact, it has been suggested that W.D. Fard Muhammad had been a member of the MSTA. Furthermore, a few historians believe that not only was Muhammad a member of the Moorish Science Temple of America, but that he also assumed leadership of the Moorish movement after Ali's untimely death in 1929 declaring himself, "the reincarnation of Noble Drew Ali."¹²⁴ By 1930, this assumed leadership eventually spawned a split in the organization, which would prompt Ali to begin his very own counter-identity movement. One sect of the Moors remained faithful to Noble Drew Ali and his

¹²⁴ Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism*, 35.

teachings, and this faction continues to spread the teachings of their prophet in present day society, which my father is a member of. The other sect is believed to have followed the teachings of W.D. Fard Muhammad and became some of the first members of the Nation of Islam.

Similar to Noble Drew Ali, some aspects of W.D. Wallace Fard Muhammad's early life are mysterious and open to speculation. However, in contrast to Ali's early upbringings, some details of Muhammad's background and character are found in various police-department and FBI records. According to law enforcement documents of the early twentieth century, Muhammad was born in New Zealand or Portland, Oregon on February 26, 1891 to either Hawaiian, British, or Polynesian parents. These law enforcement reports also assert that he used the aliases Fred Dobb and Wallace Ford. Moreover, these documents contend that Fard Muhammad married and fathered a son in the early twentieth century, whom he abandoned prior to moving to Los Angeles during World War I.¹²⁵ It is claimed that his formal education was minimal before opening a café in the 1920s. To complicate matters, Fard Muhammad also fell into a life of crime. According to historian Claude Clegg III, as early as 1918, he was arrested for assault with a deadly weapon. After being released from this charge, Fard was arrested for violating the California Prohibition Law and, "a month later, was again detained along with a half Chinese associate, for selling narcotics in his restaurant at 803 West Third Street."¹²⁶ For these multiple crime violations on May 28, 1926 was sentenced to a prison term of six months to six years at San Quentin where he presumably worked in a jute mill and in road construction while serving his time. Following his release on May 27, 1929 he departed from Los Angeles in

¹²⁵ Claude Andrew Clegg III, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 20.

¹²⁶ Clegg III, *An Original Man*, 21.

a Model A Ford coupe. Before arriving at his final destination of Detroit, where he would ultimately form the NOI, he made a stop in Chicago. While in the Windy City, it is claimed that he came into contact with the Ahmadiyya movement, followers of Noble Drew Ali, and Garveyites. His stay in Chicago was brief, however, it is claimed that after meeting members from these three prominent Black counter-identity movements, Muhammad headed to Detroit with his own plans for Blacks there.¹²⁷

When Muhammad landed in the Motor City, presumably mid-1930, he began to work as a retail salesman among African Americans. Although, many did not have much money to spend due to the severity of the Great Depression that crippled America during the inter-war period. Nevertheless, Muhammad was able to gain entry into the homes of Blacks in by telling his prospective buyers that the clothing he sold, “was the kind that Negro people use in their home country in the East.”¹²⁸ Once Muhammad had aroused the interest of his host, he began to discuss the history and future of African Americans. Later on, halls were rented for his preaching's regarding the future of African Americans, and an organizational structure for his Nation of Islam began to take shape among Detroit's lower-class Blacks. Muhammad's preaching was based on a manufactured grassroots Islamic ideology. This ideology would prove influential enough to gain the attention of many profound orators and figures. Arguably, the most influential figure to accept the teachings of Muhammad was Elijah Poole. Poole would later become Elijah Muhammad, the organization's leader until the mid-1970s.

In a relatively sharp contrast to Fard Muhammad, the soon to be leader of the NOI Elijah Muhammad was born and raised in the American South. Born Elijah Poole in October 1897 in

¹²⁷ Clegg III, *An Original Man*, 21.

¹²⁸ Clegg III, *An Original Man*, 21.

Sandersville, Georgia, Poole was the second male of six children and named by his grandfather who teasingly called the young Elijah a prophet and “predicted that he would one day be just that.”¹²⁹ Elijah’s father William, between the constant sharecropping for various farmers and working in multiple sawmills, pastored the Bold Spring Baptist Church and Union Baptist Church. Poole’s mother Mariah like so many other Black women in the post-Reconstruction South, worked as a domestic for local White families receiving only a fraction of the wages that working males commanded and dictated.¹³⁰ By 1900 the Pooles left Sandersville and settled in nearby Cordele located in Dooly, later Crisp, county. This move would prove instrumental to Elijah’s psychological development mainly because it was here where he would experience the atrocities that Blacks were facing during the early twentieth century. In fact, by the age of fourteen while Elijah was struggling to accept Christian theology after being pressured to join the local Baptist Church, he would drop-out of school to help his family survive. Like many Cordele Blacks who commonly dropped out of public schools for Blacks, Elijah was among the, “25 percent of Cordele Blacks who stood at the chasm of illiteracy”¹³¹ While coming of age in Cordele, and learning second-hand history from various family members, Elijah would experience an era in Georgia that would prompt him to re-locate and eventually leave the South.

In Georgia specifically, there had been one hundred and fifty-nine lynchings during the 1890s, and as late as 1916 sixteen people lost their lives to vigilante violence. These periods were extremely vital to Elijah’s development because he would not only witness public lynchings but also experience systematic racism whilst growing up in the American South. In fact, around the winter of 1907 when Elijah was ten years old, he entered the African American

¹²⁹ Clegg III, *An Original Man*, 6.

¹³⁰ Clegg III, *An Original Man*, 7.

¹³¹ Clegg III, *An Original Man*, 9.

section of Cordele, presumably attempting to sell firewood in town, and encountered a large crowd of Whites. When he moved closer to see what the crowd was staring at, he saw the corpse of an eighteen-year-old Black youth whom Elijah had known, “dangling from a tree limb.”¹³² According to Elijah Muhammad, the teen had been accused of raping a White woman, and without a proper trial, was seized by a White mob and hung by the neck from a willow tree and riddled with bullets in a public fashion for the entire community to see. Elijah, who was rightfully traumatized by this experience did not understand the African American community’s docile response to this event and possibly made him susceptible to later separatist ideologies such as Fard’s. In any event, this experience would stay with Elijah and would prompt him to leave Cordele at age sixteen and move to Macon, Georgia before his ultimate departure to Detroit, Michigan in 1923.¹³³ It was this move that would place him in the proximity of Fard Muhammad with whom he would meet in 1931.

During the 1920s Elijah Poole had experienced every extreme that Detroit had to offer. To be clear, Poole arrived in the North as the largest wave of the Great Migration had ceased. By 1923 Blacks were still migrating to Northern cities but not nearly at the same rate as during the period between 1910 and 1920. Poole found non-consistent odd jobs through the 1920s which included positions at the American Nut Company, the American Wire and Brass Company, the Detroit Copper Company, and the Briggs Body and Chevrolet Axle Company. Employment at the latter company consisted of work in a foundry where metal was processed for automobile construction. Poole’s extended periods of unemployment became heightened after the stock market crash in 1929, and subsequently influenced him to excessively use alcohol to cope with

¹³² Clegg III, *An Original Man*, 10.

¹³³ Clegg III, *An Original Man*, 11.

the stresses of attempting to financially support his family.¹³⁴ Paired with these financial struggles, the Poole family were also witnessing a great deal of racial discrimination taking place in Detroit and in the independent municipality of Hamtramck in which they lived. In fact, during their first two years of residence in Michigan, Elijah Muhammad saw, two Blacks killed by policeman, which convinced him that, “the difference between the North and the South is that they do not hang them up in trees, but they kill them right here on the streets!”¹³⁵ Between January 1, 1925 and June 30, 1926 twenty-five Blacks were killed by Detroit law enforcement officers as compared to twenty-four Whites.¹³⁶ A compilation of all of these contributing factors influenced Elijah to attend one of Fard’s gatherings in the fall of 1931. According to Elijah, after two failed attempts to enter one of Fard’s gatherings, he described his first sighting of Fard, as a “short fair-skinned man with dark, straight hair, the Islamic instructor was difficult to distinguish from a White man yet appeared comfortable among large crowds of Detroit Blacks.”¹³⁷ Many were attracted to Fard because of his preaching style and possibly European characteristics. Beside his willingness to counsel Blacks in matters of race and religion, whilst possessing a light complexion himself thereby impressing the few who chose to listen to his program. Fard also possessed a powerful flare for the dramatic, paired with a charismatic delivery that impressed those who attended his gatherings.¹³⁸

Among the many who waited to shake his hand, Elijah spoke to the messenger and grasped his attention with his words. According to Elijah, although Fard was used to well-

¹³⁴ Zafar I. Ansari, “W.D. Muhammad: The Making of a Black Muslim Leader (1933-1961),” *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* Vol. 2.2 (December 1985): 249.

¹³⁵ Wilma V. Henrickson, *Detroit Perspectives: Crossroads and Turning Points* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991): 328.

¹³⁶ Henrickson, *Detroit Perspectives*, 328.

¹³⁷ Clegg III, *An Original Man*, 21.

¹³⁸ Clegg III, *An Original Man*, 23.

wishers who pledged future support when he spoke to him, he candidly declared, “You are the one we read in the Bible that he would come in the last day under the name Jesus, you are the one!”¹³⁹ This declaration caught Fard off guard and he responded with a very serious gaze and whispered into Elijah’s ear, “Yes, I am the one, but who knows that but yourself, and be quiet.”¹⁴⁰ Overcome with curiosity by Fard’s proclamation of being Jesus reincarnated, and naming himself Mahdi or God, Elijah engulfed himself in the early teachings of the Nation of Islam and even received a surname, Karriem, and forever dropped his given name of Poole. Furthermore, Elijah would privately pray to Fard, asking to see the day when the righteous Muslims would set up the kingdom of God and punish the White man for his evil against the Black people.

What attracted Elijah and many other early followers was Fard’s ideology and grassroots concept of American Islam which combined elements of Black Christianity, orthodox Islam, Black fraternal organizations such as the Prince Hall Masons, and established counter-identity movements. Before his departure from Detroit and the organization in 1933, Fard’s early doctrine and ideology focused on the liberation of African Americans. In fact, much of Fard’s early ideology would continue to be used by Elijah Muhammad when he assumed leadership of the Nation of Islam in 1933. Fard’s ultimate objective for his organization was to create a distinct racial separatist cultural group. Thus, his organization contributed greatly to the Black intellectual response to White racism that occurred during the early twentieth century. As Fard began to make his presence known in the Detroit area as a common peddler and lay preacher during the early 1930s, he started out warning Blacks in the area about their vices in such as

¹³⁹ Hatim Abdul Sahib al-Ka’bi, *The Nation of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago, Department of Sociology, 1951): 91-92.

¹⁴⁰ Sahib, *The Nation of Islam*, 92.

adultery, alcohol consumption, smoking, and dancing. Furthermore, he encouraged his early followers to work hard, be thrifty, put their families first, to respect local authority and to conduct their business dealings with honesty and dignity.¹⁴¹ After proclaiming himself a prophet, and later Jesus reincarnated, during the early stages of the Nation of Islam he professed a profound message of African American identity and destiny.

Fard commonly cited the Bible while he taught Black people what he claimed was the religion of their brothers and sisters in Africa and the Orient. Fard brilliantly realized, that the Bible was the most common religious text to the Blacks of Detroit and utilized and manipulated it to validate his claims regarding Black people's history and White people's impending doom. Moreover, Fard's early teachings, which would carry on to Elijah's leadership, openly attacked the White race, the religion of Christianity and the Bible as a guiding text. Citing directly from the book of Revelation, Fard informed his followers and the Black community about the coming War of Armageddon, a battle between the forces of good and evil that would be fought in, "Har-Magedon in the plains of Esdraelon."¹⁴² Fard informed the Black community that the valley of Esdraelon was, "the wilderness of North America", and the War of Armageddon would represent the final conflict between Black and White people.¹⁴³ Furthermore, Fard professed that the only hope for Black people to win this impending war was to convert to their natural religion of Islam and to reclaim their original identity as Muslims. This identity was not only an intellectual response to White racism but also a divine right for all African Americans.

As Fard told his early followers in August 1931, at the former UNIA hall on West Lake Street in Detroit, the term Negro was indeed a misnomer for the people of the Black African

¹⁴¹ Turner, *Islam*, 149.

¹⁴² Turner, *Islam*, 150.

¹⁴³ Turner, *Islam*, 150.

diaspora; and this term was created by the White race to separate African Americans from their original Asiatic roots. Furthermore, Fard declared that the Blacks of North America, “were not Americans but Asiatics whose ancestors had been taken from the African-Asiatic world by European slave traders in the name of Christianity four hundred years earlier.”¹⁴⁴ Moreover, in professing this ideology of an anthropological past that included Blacks’ Asiatic roots Fard continued by telling those in attendance that they were indeed the lost members of the tribe of Shabazz “The Black men in North America are not Negroes, but members of the loss tribe of Shabazz, stolen by traders from the Holy City of Mecca 379 years ago. The Prophet came to America to find and bring back to life his long loss brethren, from whom the Caucasians had taken away their language, their nation, and their religion.”¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, Fard included in his ideology a sense of pride which asserted that the Asiatics were the original human beings, “whose ancient civilization included the Nile Valley and the holy city of Mecca, while the slave masters were descendants of blue-eyed mutants who had been developed from Black people by a mad Black scientist named Yacub. Following this genetic experiment, the White race had enslaved the Asiatics for six thousand years.”¹⁴⁶

In addition to revealing their newfound identity, Fard insisted that Blacks/Muslims, rid themselves of their slave master’s name. Therefore, Fard made it a priority that whoever joined the organization was given a new name. One of the final tenets of the early NOI was for Fard’s followers to understand that they were not a part of the United States but instead were citizens of Mecca and owed allegiance solely to the Muslim flag. To further establish the separatist agenda of his counter-identity movement, Fard insisted that all members should take their children out of

¹⁴⁴ Turner, *Islam*, 150.

¹⁴⁵ Erdmann D. Beynon, “The Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants in Detroit,” *American Journal of Sociology* 43 (July 1937-May 1938), p. 897-901.

¹⁴⁶ Turner, *Islam*, 156.

public schools and send them to the University of Islam to study Arabic, the Quran, Black history, astronomy, and higher mathematics. Moreover, along with proposing a Black Muslim university, Fard established the Moslem Girls Training and Civilization Classes for Women and the Fruit of Islam, or FOI, a paramilitary organization for men.¹⁴⁷ These were the basic ideals of the early Nation of Islam under Fard Muhammad. Many of these ideals would remain and others would be added and edited to recruit more members under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad. To be clear, the Nation of Islam only recruited a small number of African Americans during its early years of inception under Fard Muhammad, and afterwards. Along with these organizational ideologies and practices, which included an orthodox Islamic dietary program, there were also initiation rituals under Fard's leadership that every member had to adhere to join and advance in the organization.

Similar to Noble Drew Ali's Moors, the Nation of Islam Muslims had to both go through an initiation to gain membership and denounce their American identity. The Moors aligned themselves with a Moroccan identity and or lineage and were granted nationality cards upon acceptance into the organization. Even Marcus Garvey's UNIA had an initiation process in the form of initiation fees and paying dues in which each accepted member paid five cents per month to aid in a death tax, which would help UNIA families with funeral costs and membership social functions.¹⁴⁸ The Nation of Islam's initiation process under Fard's leadership, and afterwards, was more stringent, structured, and based on the recruit's knowledge, resembling a more fraternal structure. In fact, to officially join this counter-identity movement the first initiation ritual for an interested observer was to write out a letter stating that he or she had accepted the

¹⁴⁷ Turner, *Islam*, 166-167.

¹⁴⁸ Robert A. Hill, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers: The Caribbean Diaspora, 1910-1920 Volume XI* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), xxxv.

teachings of the Muslims, which included the anthropological ideology, and would like to be given an original name. The letter had to be free of any grammatical or spelling errors, and if it contained any of these minor errors it would be sent back to the recruit for rewriting. Once the new convert would satisfy the letter requirements the next step in the initiation process was to memorize various lessons that dealt with the philosophy of the Nation.¹⁴⁹

According to Clegg, the first lesson that a new convert had to learn was known as Student Enrollment, which is “a list of ten questions and answers about various population groups, the size of the earth, and the Original Man.”¹⁵⁰ The next lesson was known as Actual Facts which consisted of, “eighteen statements on the natural features of the earth, such as mountains, oceans, and deserts and their measurements.”¹⁵¹ English Lesson No. CI, part three, is a, “series of thirty-six questions and answers that focus on Fard’s mission and the prediction of African Americans.”¹⁵² The last lesson that a new convert would learn which were known as the Lost and Found Moslem Lessons No. 1 and No. 2 which focused more on fifty-four queries and solutions that concentrated on geographical statistics, the history of Black people, and the White devils, or White people, and the end of the world.¹⁵³ These lessons were taken in traditional classroom settings by new recruits who were fed up with their position in the United States. Therefore, for the few who chose to join the Nation of Islam or any of the counter-identity movements that have been covered thus far, the stringent initiation processes were a minor price for a new identity; and the lessons learned from the leaders of these groups were priceless. Once the recruit had mastered the lessons, they were promptly granted an original name. The original

¹⁴⁹ Clegg III, *An Original Man*, 26.

¹⁵⁰ Clegg III, *An Original Man*, 27.

¹⁵¹ Clegg III, *An Original Man*, 27.

¹⁵² Clegg III, *An Original Man*, 27.

¹⁵³ Clegg III, *An Original Man*, 27.

Arabic name or an X represented the surnames of unknown ancestors, as well as the fact that the member had given up their worldly vices and truly accepted the Muslim lifestyle. Receiving an X surname was meant to be temporary at least until Fard and his successor Elijah Muhammad bestowed upon the follower an Arabic name such as Ali or Muhammad. However, many members went years or even a lifetime before they were granted such a surname.¹⁵⁴ Also, this new identity involved complete separation from the American infrastructure. Fard established a manufactured system of Fardian Islam that called for the Nation to isolate the newly converted Muslim from any outside contact it deemed destructive and attempted to redefine the values of the individual. Early on new recruits would don fezzes, similar to the Moors, and miniature National pins and were taught to understand the War of Armageddon, and Islamic symbolism such as the star and crescent.¹⁵⁵

Along with these psychological conditions that new members had to learn and swiftly follow, they also had to become familiar with the organizational leadership structure and formal positions. The leadership and formal organizational structure were meant to be the focal point for any concerns or grievances that members may have. Furthermore, the organizational structure included the following. First, Fard and his supreme minister Elijah Karriem, who ruled the movement in a monarchical manner; Second, a cadre of assistant ministers, serving at the pleasure of Fard Muhammad, administered the temple's everyday affairs and instructed the believers. Third, the Fruit of Islam (FOI) which was established among the men in the Nation to maintain order and decorum in the temples. Under the Supreme Captain, which during Fard's leadership was Kalot Muhammad, Elijah's brother, the Fruit of Islam or FOI enforced the laws

¹⁵⁴ Clegg III, *An Original Man*, 27.

¹⁵⁵ Clegg III, *An Original Man*, 28.

of the movement through example first but by coercion when necessary. The FOI were used for protection at temples in case of any interference during services or Nation events. In conjunction with the FOI an intelligence service was formed to keep up with the activities of those suspected of breaking temple rules.¹⁵⁶ Any movement in its early stages, as discussed with Noble Drew Ali's MSTA, experiences challenges, possible backlash, and internal conflict. The Nation of Islam is not unique in this phenomenon. In fact, some of the first issues within the NOI begun during the second year of its existence which contributed to Fard's court ordered dismissal from Detroit, and disassociation with the Nation of Islam. These early issues within the organization would serve as a precursor to incidents that would later result in the dismissal and eventual persecution of one of the NOI's most popular member's, minister Malcom X.

By 1932 tensions within the Nation of Islam intensified between Supreme Minister Elijah Karriem and former right-hand man to Fard Muhammad Abdul Muhammad. According to historian C. Eric Lincoln, Abdul did not approve of Fard's selection of Karriem and openly expressed dismay by creating divisions within the organization. As a former MSTA Moor, Abdul introduced Noble Drew Ali's teachings to NOI members which prompted many to deviate from Fard's teachings. Elijah presumably informed Fard Muhammad of Abdul's dealings resulting in Abdul Muhammad's dismissal from the NOI.¹⁵⁷ Another incident that undermined Fard's leadership was sparked by Robert Harris. Harris believed by Detroit law enforcement to be a former member of the NOI and the MSTA had brutally murdered his neighbor James Smith on November 20, 1932. Furthermore, Harris reportedly mentioned that he had been, "commanded to kill someone by the Gods of Islam, and that the order was based off a fifteen-hundred-year

¹⁵⁶ Clegg III, *An Original Man*, 28.

¹⁵⁷ Lincoln, *Black Muslims*, 63-65.

prophecy.”¹⁵⁸ Additionally, law enforcement discovered Harris’ hit list included Mayor Frank Murphy, Judge Edward J. Jefferies, and other public officials.¹⁵⁹

The Robert Harris episode greatly discredited the Detroit Muslim community as a whole. This incident also prompted law enforcement to swiftly infiltrate Muslim organizations and bring leaders in for questioning. The apparent connection between Harris and Fard led to Fard’s arrest on November 23. Whilst law enforcement officers were building a case against Fard Muhammad, they conducted extended research and concluded that Fard and Elijah’s statements related to killing White devils in connection to blood sacrifices merited a further investigation of the Nation of Islam.¹⁶⁰ Ultimately, Detroit law enforcement officials were unable to build a solid case against Fard Muhammad. Still, they demanded that he leave the Motor city in May of 1933, although Elijah later claimed that Fard’s departure actually took place in June of 1934, and that the Detroit Police Department granted the permission to speak to his followers before his departure. During his sendoff, Fard reportedly told a group of his followers, “Don’t worry, I am with you: I will be back to you in the near future to lead you out of this hell.”¹⁶¹

Elijah Muhammad was now the Supreme Minister of the Nation of Islam and served as its leader. The first few months of his reign witnessed former Supreme Minister Abdul Muhammad’s creation of a new Muslim organization that pledged loyalty to the U.S. Constitution and preached hatred toward Elijah Muhammad and his followers. The other group formed after Fard’s departure and Elijah’s rise to power was an organization known as Rebels against the Will of Allah. These were Muslims who wanted to escape the stigma of human

¹⁵⁸ “Cult Killer Bares Plot on Mayor,” *Detroit Evening Times*, November 23, 1932, 1-2.

¹⁵⁹ “Cult Killer Bares Plot on Mayor,” 2.

¹⁶⁰ Clegg III, *An Original Man*, 33.

¹⁶¹ Clegg III, *An Original Man*, 34.

sacrifice associated with the Robert Harris case.¹⁶² Over the next few years, Elijah's Nation of Islam went through multiple controversies and public altercations with law enforcement and rival Muslim groups. The revised group now led by Elijah Muhammad continued to preach the concept of Islam being the savior of the race. Also, established temples that set up in various locations in the Midwest, including Chicago which operated as Elijah Muhammad's headquarters. The creation of this infrastructure helped the Nation of Islam to increase membership and establish an economic presence in various cities. Furthermore, the initiation of Malcolm Little during the 1950s would subsequently enhance the organization's visibility.

After Elijah Muhammad assumed the leadership of the Nation of Islam, he retained much of Fard's organizational structure and added a few additions to help the group attract new members. One of the main additions that Elijah brought to the Nation of Islam was an upgrade of the organizational flag. Under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad, the flag which previously featured a crescent moon and star, similar to the Moorish Science Temple flag, now included letters. The letters included: J, for justice, F, for freedom, E, for equality, and I for Islam.¹⁶³ These minor additions meant that the flag and the movement that it represented stood for a cause larger than itself. Although the organization's doctrine and message called for a great cause, to have these letters on their flag meant that these words represented the group's core values as a counter-identity movement. Also, Elijah Muhammad became much more outspoken than Fard in regard to spreading the message. Consequently, he authored many books that spread the Nation's truth. One of the most popular works produced by Elijah Muhammad was *Message to the Black Blackman in America* written in 1965, which outlined older and revised teachings. This book

¹⁶² Clegg III, *An Original Man*, 35.

¹⁶³ Michael Parenti, "The Black Muslims: From Revolution to Institution," *Social Research* 31, no. 2 (Summer 1964): 175-194, <https://www.jstor.com/stable/40969726>.

called for the advancement of the African American race and somewhat mirrored Noble Drew Ali's doctrine when he stated, "Not knowing self or anyone else, they (the American so-called Negro), are a prey in the hands of the White race, the world's archdeceivers (the real devils in person)." ¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, Muhammad invokes Garveyism when he declares in *Message to the Blackman in America*, "It is time for us, Black Americans, to learn who we really are, and it is time for us to understand ourselves." ¹⁶⁵ Along with this Garveyism influence, he also proclaimed that Islam was a secret that was purposely hidden by the White race to keep the American Negro oppressed. Similar to Noble Drew Ali's claim that the last seven chapters were kept out of the *Quran*, which became his *Circle Seven Quran*, Muhammad professed, "this is the first time that it has been revealed, the knowledge of God, and we, the poor rejected and despised people, are blessed to be the first of all the people of earth to receive this secret knowledge of God." ¹⁶⁶ Other components that Elijah Muhammad enhanced under his leadership was the Nation's business presence and its dietary code subsequently published in two volumes.

In terms of business, Muhammad proclaims to Blacks in an attempt to bring about financial literacy in *Message to the Blackman in America*, "there are those with knowledge and expertise of the grocery business, pool your knowledge, open a grocery store and you work collectively and harmoniously, Allah will bless you with success. If there are those with knowledge of dressmaking, merchandising, trades, maintenance, pool your knowledge. Do not be ashamed to seek guidance and instructions from the brother or sister who has more experience, education and training than they have had. Accept his or her assistance." ¹⁶⁷ Along

¹⁶⁴ Elijah Muhammad, *The Message to the Blackman in America* (Phoenix: Secretarius MEMPS Publications, 1973), 9.

¹⁶⁵ Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman*, 35.

¹⁶⁶ Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman*, 10.

¹⁶⁷ Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman*, 174.

with this apparent similarity to Garvey's approach to economics in the African American community, Muhammad also published the dietary laws of Black Muslims in his work titled *How to eat to Live Book No. 1 and No. 2*. Some of the main tenants of this work is the *One Meal a day* chapter, and *Foods to Avoid* chapter. Some of the main lessons addressed in both chapters include: "Eat one meal a day or one meal every other day, and it will prolong your life. Do not think that you will starve. On the contrary, you will be treating yourself to life, and a life filled with sickless days. You can hardly get sick eating this way."¹⁶⁸ For the *Foods to Avoid* chapter the main takeaways are, "We were reared on the animal flesh that was the divinely prohibited flesh (the hog). We must not eat or put our hands in the carcass of the hog or sit around a place where it is being slaughtered or cooked. We should not even get the odor of it in our nostrils. It is a sin to deliberately stand and smell it being slaughtered and cooked."¹⁶⁹ This latter dietary law is vital because it relates to orthodox Islamic doctrine and Muslims being prohibited from eating pork and to only follow a halal food plan. These features attracted Malcolm Little who was imprisoned at Norfolk Prison Colony around 1948.

By 1946 when Elijah Muhammad returned to Detroit from federal prison, the nation's membership was down to four hundred. In 1940, before he was sent to jail, the Nation had more than seven thousand followers in five states. Most African Americans who left the NOI were fearful of being indicted for draft evasion, the reason for Elijah Muhammad's incarceration. By the time Malcolm X was released on April 7, 1952 the Nation was in shambles. Shortly after Malcolm's release from prison, he began to attract members to the Nation of Islam. He was a gifted orator, far superior to Elijah Muhammad. Also, the tenacious manner of his speeches made

¹⁶⁸ Elijah Muhammad, *How to eat to Live: Book No. 1* (Phoenix: Secretarius MEMPS Publications, 1967), 22.

¹⁶⁹ Muhammad, *How to eat to Live*, 91.

him all the more popular.¹⁷⁰ In fact, on May 1, 1955 Malcolm officially opened Muhammad's Temple of Islam No. 16 in Lansing, MI which is where his father Earl Little once headed the local UNIA chapter. Furthermore, "After two weeks in Lansing, Malcolm X quickly moved on to Joilet, Illinois, then Cleveland and Dayton, Ohio, and from there to Camden, Patterson, and Jersey City, New Jersey. At each stop he opened a new temple. By the end of the year, Malcolm X had established more than twenty-seven temples, adding to the seven functioning temples that existed when he left prison three years earlier."¹⁷¹

Malcom's popularity and extensive press coverage ultimately led to his demise even though he had influenced such public figures as Cassius Clay to join the Nation of Islam. A combination of contributing factors influenced Malcolm X to reassess his relationship with the Nation of Islam, leading to his departure from the organization in March of 1964.¹⁷² After his return from his Islamic pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca in April of 1964 he focused on his two newly formed organizations: Muslim Mosque Inc, and Organization of Afro-American Unity. The first served as a religious organization, and the other served as a cause for pan-Africanism. According to historian Karl Evanzz, when Nation of Islam members found out about Elijah Muhammad's infidelity rumors and Malcolm's departure, "In Boston, for example more than 200 of the 500 registered members of Muslim Mosque No. 11 quit to join Malcolm's Muslim Mosque in the week following Malcolm's departure. And in Detroit, considered one of Elijah Muhammad's strongholds, at least 150 Muslims quit Mosque No. 1 in anticipation of following Malcolm X."¹⁷³ Ultimately, Malcolm X was assassinated on February 21, 1965 in

¹⁷⁰ Karl Evanzz, *The Judas Factor: The Plot to Kill Malcolm X* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1992), 26-27.

¹⁷¹ Evanzz, *The Judas Factor*, 66.

¹⁷² Evanzz, *The Judas Factor*, 236.

¹⁷³ Evanzz, *The Judas Factor*, 218.

New York City at the Audubon Ballroom while addressing his followers. It has been speculated that the Nation of Islam, in conjunction with government agencies, murdered Malcolm X. Additionally, Malcolm's public assassination created an increased media presence for the group. This negative attention from multiple media outlets would result in yet another internal split, after the death of Elijah Muhammad, that would permanently change the organization's image in modern day society.

Whatever the actual cause of Malcolm's assassination, the Nation of Islam has received a tainted reputation ever since. Elijah Muhammad passed in 1975 and after an internal split Louis X, later known as Louis Farrakhan, became the leader of the Nation. Farrakhan is still very active, and his Nation of Islam remains the most influential and largest African American counter-identity movement. Although, the Nation of Islam has received a great deal of negative coverage since the assassination of Malcolm X, their leader Louis Farrakhan and his followers do not soften their image for the public to cater to a modern-day audience. Virtually all of its doctrines remain the same under Farrakhan's leadership. Fard's vision of a nation within a nation, operating completely separate from the African American framework, remains loyal to his early doctrine and belief in the anthropological past, linking Blacks to the lost Tribe of Shabazz. Moreover, the movement has maintained its visibility well into the twenty-first century. The reason for this is that the Nation Islam, from the beginning, has operated within the African American framework. For instance, the NOI unlike the MSTA, established moderately successful businesses that both served its members and the larger Black community. These businesses continue to operate within the Black community offering their retail services and operating as a staple for further recruitment in the twenty-first century. The Nation of Islam has utilized their many businesses as a tool to ensure that their presence is permanently cemented in

the larger Black community. Although, only a small number of African Americans have historically joined the counter-identity movements, the NOI's constant presence and Black businesses are the prime factors that have made them the most influential of these organizations in the United States.

CHAPTER 6

RESULTS OF RESEARCH/CONCLUSION

The African American counter-identity movements of the early twentieth century could be characterized as radical to many, if not extreme to others. However, for the few Blacks who chose to join the three organizations discussed in this thesis, they were more than a simple swap of lifestyle and societal status. During the Great Migration while Blacks were escaping the Jim Crow South in droves, Noble Drew Ali offered Blacks a new identity that promoted an African ancestry, and a Moorish nationality. The groundwork that was laid by Ali helped make it possible for Pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey to establish his UNIA organization in the Northern and Midwestern states, offering a message that catered to Blacks who yearned for a political and cultural identity, which embraced their African roots.

After, Garvey's UNIA and Noble Drew Ali's MSTA reigned supreme during the 1920s, the NOI made its grand entrance on the eve of the Great Depression. This organization not only became the most successful Black counter-identity movement in the United States, but it also learned significant lessons from its predecessors. Only two of these three groups remain in modern day America, and they have never gained the popularity that they once had during their peak years. Although these three movements never gained a large percentage of Blacks during their time, their reaction to the oppressive Jim Crow South and racist Northern and Midwestern cities represented a distinct response to societal prejudice. Moreover, the way these movements dealt with the issue of identity in the early twentieth century represents a vital addition to the historiography. The Moorish Science Temple of America, the Universal Negro Improvement Association and the Nation of Islam, beg the following questions regarding the current status of Black identity: How will Black social movements of the twenty-first century deal with the issue

of identity? Does the contemporary revitalization of Black pride suggest that Black counter-identity movement may still be attractive and relevant? With the current atrocities being inflicted on the African American race by White prejudice and racism, the issue of identity remains as relevant as it was during the early twentieth century. Movements such as Black Lives Matter have etched out an important space in the current American framework. This movement, and a few smaller ones, has influenced national and international activism related to the issues of Black freedom and identity. History suggests that Black Lives Matter and other modern Black social movements would be well-served to study the historical evolution of groups such as the MSTA, the UNIA, and the NOI. This among other things, could provide important insights, both positive and negative, related to developing an organizational response to ongoing White racism.

Early twentieth century African Americans faced many challenges. Among other things, southern Black migrants faced intense discrimination in Northern and Midwestern cities. Neighborhood disagreements between the races over housing and employment resulted in the Red Summer race riots of 1919 which prompted an increased suspicion of Blacks in the years that followed. Moreover, northern Black resistance to White attacks during the Red Summer race riots, paired with the bravery exhibited by African American troops during World War I, helped generate a revitalized racial identity during the inter-war period. This identity was unique because it was in sharp contrast to that of the Southern Negro who had been extremely oppressed by Jim Crow and its societal discrimination. The New Negroes viewed themselves as educated, artistic, and intellectual members of society who deserved to be recognized. Noble Drew Ali and his Moors gained prominence during this period of the new prideful Black peoples and offered a new identity that would stretch this racial pride even further.

His organization ensured that Blacks who joined be granted African nationality, and an alternative lifestyle separate from that of the African American experience. This distinct response to White racism was the first of its kind because it connected all African Americans to the Moroccan past that was vibrant and vast. For those who joined, this was an escape from the harsh realities of the African American. The Moorish Science Temple of America represents Noble Drew Ali's solution to the issue of identity. It was bold, unique, and vulnerable to factionalism and many criticisms. Although, the MSTA still exists today it is far less visible and influential that it was during the 1920s, when the organization claimed to have nearly thirty thousand members. The Moorish Scient Temple's lack of a significant lasting impact may serve as a cautionary lesson to modern day activists seeking to construct their own Black social movements.

While Noble Drew Ali's MSTA sought to promote Black societal freedom, Marcus Garvey's UNIA attempted to provided prideful Blacks a chance to gain both societal and political freedom. Garvey's UNIA, uniquely, called for all peoples of African descent worldwide to come together on one accord, through his organization, so that they could enjoy all the freedoms that they deserved. The international approach of Garvey's UNIA, with its message of Black pride and Pan-African political and economic power, appealed to the Black masses around the world. Both Garvey's UNIA and Ali's MSTA achieved peak popularity during the 1920s. Unfortunately, Garvey's deportation in 1927 and Noble Drew Ali's death in 1929 would result in the downfall of both groups and would give way for the rise of the Nation of Islam.

The NOI became the most popular Black counter-identity movement out of the three with direct influences from both. This organization offered its members a new Asiatic identity that called for their complete separation from the American framework. This nation within a nation

recruited such prominent figures such as Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali thereby solidifying its place in historiography as the most influential Black counter-identity movement. Furthermore, this thesis may serve as a useful secondary source to future researchers examining Black counter-identity movements and their contribution to the African American experience.

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