

FIRST MAGAZINE INTERVIEW WITH ELIJAH MUHAMMAD BLACK MUSLIM LEADER

by Bob Lucas

"If we lose ten thousand of the ten million (Negroes), we will still have enough left to build a decent civilization!" declared the Honorable Elijah Muhammad at a recent mass rally of Black Muslims in Philadelphia. As the capacity audience stood and applauded, he added, "I don't incline you to take up arms or strike back; we move according to the will of God."

It was to probe beyond such enigmatic, but strangely disquieting, statements as these that I visited the leader of the Black Muslims at his 18-room mansion near the University of Chicago. I sought the answers to questions about this militant, black-nationalist movement that puzzles a growing number of Americans—Negro as well as white.

What is behind the doctrine of "black supremacy" they preach? Are they seeking unity with the more moderate Negro organizations? Will they become a political force in this country? What are the positive aspects of Islam as it is practiced by America's Black Muslims?

My appointment with Mr. Muhammad coincided with dinner time, and he graciously invited me to join him. The Messenger, as his followers call

him, took his place at the head of the table. He cupped his hands in front of him, bowed his head, and murmured a prayer in Arabic.

Standing at his right was Malcolm X, his most articulate spokesman and minister of Harlem's Mosque No. 7. At the foot of the table was Raymond Sharrieff, the Messenger's son-in-law and head of the FOM (Fruit of Islam), the Black Muslims' elite men's corps. I stood at the Messenger's left. There were five vacant seats at the long dining table.

After the prayer, Mr. Muhammad took his seat. His guests followed suit, and the meal began. As we ate, the spiritual leader of unknown thousands of zealous converts talked in a thin, well-modulated voice. He covered a wide range of subjects. The imminent destruction of America: "No white person, old or young, will be saved!" The March on Washington: "It was only a show." The fate of the submarine Thresher: "It was sunk by Allah" in retaliation for the death of a Black Muslim by police guns in Los Angeles.

Somewhat tolerantly, it seemed, he watched as Malcolm X made copious notes of salient points for use in future speeches, and I made notes for

this exclusive interview.

This was my second meeting with Mr. Muhammad. I had met him several months earlier at his winter home in Phoenix, Arizona, an air-conditioned ranch house originally owned by band leader Louis Jordan.

During the summer, Elijah Muhammad lives in Chicago and travels to other cities to visit mosques and speak at mass meetings. He had just returned from the Philadelphia rally where his audience had included heavyweight boxer Cassius Clay and a surprisingly large number of young, white people. Massed in the center section of the main floor, their white faces, I had noticed, were engulfed in a sea of dark faces that rose up, wave after wave, to the last tier in the balcony. With that in mind, I opened our conversation.

LUCAS: "Mr. Muhammad, I know that white people are barred from your mosques, but I've noticed that quite a few attend your public meetings."

MUHAMMAD: "Yes, and they get an earful. I don't change my message just because they're there, and it demonstrates to Negroes that I'll tell the whites off."

LUCAS: "Do you feel that the white



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