

By Hans J. Massaquoi

# Elijah Muhammad: prophet and architect of the separate Nation of Islam

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

ELIJAH MUHAMMAD  
*Messenger of Allah*



## Iron-willed cult

**E**XCEPT for the glare of floodlights which illuminate it at night, nothing distinguishes the stately mansion from other residences in the quiet, interracial oasis of affluence on the fringe of an urban renewal-bound Chicago South Side slum. Yet, it is frequently singled out by the curious stares of passersby. Rarely, though, does anyone stop to take a closer look, as if afraid to arouse the displeasure of the occupants.

The public's awe is not unfounded, for the 19 rooms behind that handsome brick facade comprise the living quarters and command post of perhaps the most powerful and most controversial black leader of today—much hated, much loved, much ridiculed, much respected Elijah Muhammad, messenger of Allah. Not since Marcus Garvey and his Back to Africa Movement has a single black man been able to generate as much unquestioning obedience in as large a group as has the whipsey, 73-year-old patriarch among his estimated 100,000 Black Muslim followers. His amazing power, which he uses with the aplomb of a field marshal commanding an army, is solidly rooted in his promise of salvation from white oppression through total submission to a black,



A highlight in Black Muslim life is Elijah Muhammad's annual address (left) to his followers in Chicago's Coliseum, an occasion which attracts thousands of faithful from 40 Black Muslim temples and mosques across the nation. At bottom of opposite page, a stern-faced Fruit of Islam bodyguard keeps a wary eye on his chief while (below) two of his comrades applaud a point made by the Messenger. Muslim women in white, ankle-length dresses and head scarfs (bottom) attend rally separated from men, according to Muslim dictates. Messenger's wife is seated sixth from left in front row. Although pledged to obedience to their husbands and fathers, women are held in esteem as bearers of black nation's future.

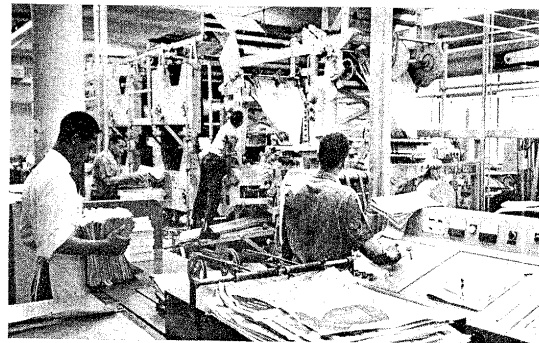
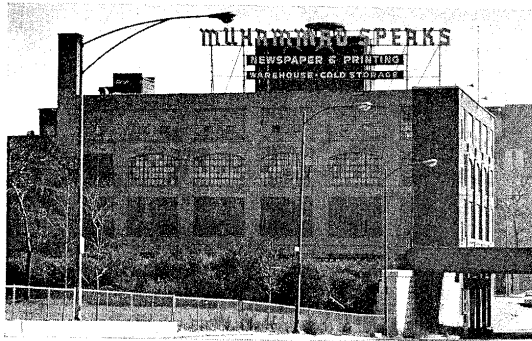


## leader masterminds vast economic self-help program





**Selling Muhammad Speaks**, the Muslims' official weekly newspaper, on Chicago street, Charles 36X (left) discharges obligation imposed on all male members. Each averages 300 copies a week. Paper, which sells for 15 cents, serves dual purpose of providing revenue while helping to disseminate group's viewpoints on current events. Muhammad Speaks Building (left, below) in Chicago, where weekly is printed, boasts new offset press (below).



**Elijah Muhammad** *Continued*

fiercely anti-white Allah and the latter's "last prophet," namely himself. As absolute ruler of the "Lost-Found Nation of Islam in the Wilderness of North America," the Black Muslims' formal name, he is also the country's most unabashed black proponent of racial separatism.

Unlike most of his fellow septuagenarians who spend their time in quiet reflection on days gone by, Muhammad has set his sights unwaveringly on the future while driving himself at a hectic pace in total disregard of his obviously frail health. The Messenger's haste leads one to suspect that, as Allah's most intimate confidant, perhaps he is privy to the ultimate secret of how much time he has left to complete his divine mission of "leading my people out of white slavery."

Toward that end, he is exhorting all black people in the United States to follow him on an economic exodus unprecedented in its magnitude, convinced that "the most important step people who want to be independent must take is to learn to feed, shelter and clothe themselves."

There is nothing fatalistic about Muhammad's brand of Islam when it comes to getting things done. Putting his money where his mouth is, the Messenger has masterminded the acquisition of a multi-million dollar, nationwide business and farming complex at a dizzying clip that has seasoned businessmen and economists in wide-eyed disbelief. Already, the Muslim's modern farming operations in Michigan, Georgia and Alabama—comprising some 4,200 acres of land—boast a dairy, chicken-breeding and egg-laying plants, more than 700 head of cattle and more than 600 head of sheep, giant storage silos, a saw mill, apple orchards, a modern cannery and vast tracts of crop-producing and grazing land. Even setbacks, such as the recent "mysterious" poisoning and shooting of 63 head of Muslim-owned cattle on their 1,000-acre St. Clair County, Ala., farm, have failed to curb Muhammad's zeal for acquiring more land. Following a vicious Ku Klux Klan harassment campaign, the incident has only hardened the Messenger's resolve to build a separate black state "where we can live in peace."

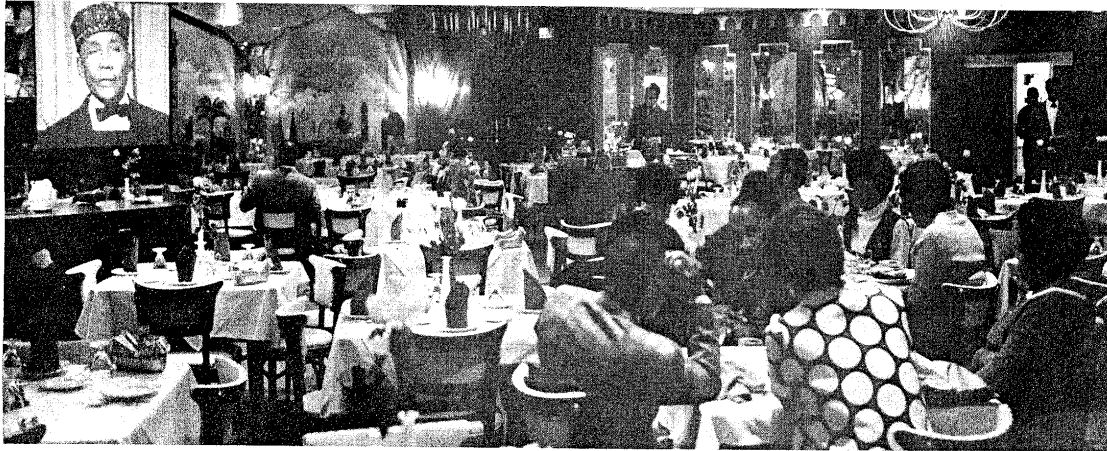
But farming is only a part of the Muslim's quest for economic independence. The accomplishment which has the brothers all but shouting with pride and joy, and which they billed accordingly as "a modern miracle by Mr. Muhammad," is the recently completed Muhammad Speaks Building, named for and housing their official weekly newspaper (circulation 600,000). Providing an expansive 60,000 square feet of floor space, the former factory building just south of Chicago's

Loop was renovated from top to bottom at a cost of more than \$2 million. In less than two years, Muhammad installed modern offices, the very latest printing facilities (including a brand-new 70-foot, four-color offset press, and a computerized photo composing room), a U. S. Government-approved meat processing plant and giant walk-in refrigerators for the storage of Muslim-grown produce and meat. Staffed by 65 Muslim and non-Muslim workers (the latter including a sprinkling of whites), the enterprise projects an atmosphere not unlike any other well-run corporation of comparable size. "The Hon. Mr. Muhammad teaches us never to mix religion with business," explains one of the Messenger's young plant executives when asked about the presence of whites. "If we can't find a qualified brother for a particular job, we hire a white man until we have been able to train a brother to take over." The Messenger himself concedes readily and with apparent glee that "quite a few white devils are helping us."

Completing the Muslims' coast to coast self-help operations are supermarkets, barbershops, a clothing factory, dry cleaning shops, clothing stores, sheep slaughtering facilities at Chicago's Stock Yards and restaurants, including the Salaam Restaurant, reputedly the finest eatery on Chicago's South Side.

Muhammad promises his followers that the best is yet to come. Negotiations are already under way for the construction of a 232-bed hospital, the purchase of a 2,000-seat mosque at a cost of \$6 million, a modern bank with 36 teller windows, a 1,000-pupil capacity elementary and secondary school, a radio and TV station, 9,000 additional acres of farm land, jet passenger planes, a University of Islam complex with science buildings and marina at a cost of \$30 million. All this, the Messenger has promised, will be completed within the '70s. And it is by no means the end, for "Islam has neither beginning nor ending."

Because of his increasingly rare public appearances and the Black Muslim brass' fondness for cloaking themselves and their spiritual leader in a veil of secrecy, Elijah Muhammad, the man, has remained an enigma, despite the growing acceptance of his ideas among blacks. What few glimpses the public has had of him have been televised fragments of his annual rallies at Chicago's Coliseum. Some Muslim officials are beginning to feel that such spotty exposure has done their leader more harm than good. They may have a point. Because of his unprepossessing, diminutive (five-foot-seven) size, his thin, asthmatic voice and his unerring sense for violating rules of syntax, television



Muslim-owned and operated Salaam Restaurant, which features choice cuisine amid Arab décor, has established reputation of being finest restaurant on Chicago's South Side. One unique feature is the showing of movies on a wide variety of topics. Above, Messenger lectures diners via film screen on the importance of black education.



Muslim-raised cattle on Muslim-owned ranch in Ashville, Ala., are fed by farm workers. Herd has meanwhile been moved to another Muslim farm in Georgia, following the poisoning of 60 head of cattle that coincided with KKK threats.



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### Elijah Muhammad *Continued*

has done about as much for the Messenger as it did for one-time presidential candidate Richard M. Nixon when he debated John F. Kennedy. "To me, Elijah Muhammad comes across as a humorless, cantankerous old autocrat who gets his kicks acting mean," says a black newswoman who has never seen him in person. "I hope," she adds, "I'll never have to interview him. I've got to be relaxed with my subjects and he gives me the creeps."

Anyone who has ever met Muhammad can attest to how unfair her

unflattering assessment is. I personally became convinced of this within minutes of my first meeting with the Messenger.

MY appointment at his mansion had been set for 10 a. m. With three minutes to spare, I rang the door bell, wondering whether our arrival (I was accompanied by a photographer) was being monitored via the closed-circuit TV camera that stared at us from the ceiling of the entrance porch. Melodious chimes inside the house summoned an elderly man in work clothes who, after learning our identity, admitted us into a spacious, green carpeted foyer and living room. Instead of the menacing karate-trained body guards I had expected, a portly, cherubic man in his 30s greeted us, introducing himself as Herbert Muhammad, one of the Messenger's six sons.

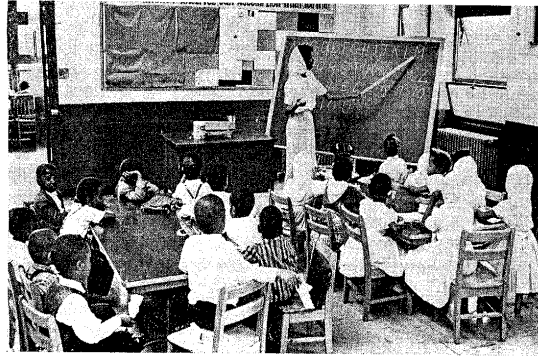
"My father will be with you in a little while," he told us casually. "Just make yourselves at home." Since the "little while" stretched to exactly 55 minutes, I had ample opportunity to look around. The walls of the living room were lined with heavily upholstered, brightly colored couches, sectionals and chairs whose transparent plastic covers had preserved their brand-new appearance for an undetermined time. Except for two enlarged photos of the Messenger as a much younger man, the walls were bare. The comfortable, yet decidedly utilitarian living room, reflected a total lack of interest in decorator touches, while copies of *Business Week* and the *Wall Street Journal* seemed to point toward a preoccupation of a rather different kind. I began to wonder how rumors had gotten started which had the Messenger living in lavish opulence amid costly *objets d'art*.

WHILE the man in work clothes set up a large tape recorder (the Messenger makes his own recordings of every interview he gives, I was told), two of Muhammad's top lieutenants arrived to sit in on the interview. They were stern-faced Raymond Sharrieff, the Messenger's son-in-law and supreme captain of his vaunted Fruit of Islam (FOI) body guard, and amiable John Ali, the Muslims' (meanwhile suspended) national secretary and public relations man.

Suddenly, with quick, almost youthful steps, the Messenger entered the room, immediately shattering many of my preconceived ideas of him with a friendly smile and a warm, two-handed clasp of my right hand. He was wearing the familiar sequin-embroidered velvet fez emblazoned with the stars and crescent of Islam, a neat, conservatively cut black business suit, a white shirt and dark bow tie. His eyes, recuperating from the removal of cataracts, were shielded by a pair of dark glasses. He appeared even more frail in person than I had imagined him—an incongruous contrast, I thought, to the thousands of strong, tough-looking black men who obey his every wish and command.

"Where do you want me to sit?" he asked obligingly. "I'll sit anywhere you say." After I assured him that any place would be all right, he laid down the ground rules for the interview—15 minutes of questions and picture-taking and no quoting out of context. "And don't pick the ugliest pictures of me for publication like the white papers always do," he warned only half joking, adding, "not that I think I'm pretty or anything like that." The terms seemed fair enough.

Except for his reticence on the subject of Muslim income, for which



### Elijah Muhammad *Continued*

he said he had no figures available and "wouldn't go into anyway," the Messenger responded readily to each of my questions—not always to the point but nonetheless with obvious eagerness to share his views.

"What is the extent of your new enterprises—your farms and your Muhammad Speaks Building?"

"We are making great forward steps toward advancement of our enterprises. We have now about between six and seven million dollars advanced in the enterprises, cash, without any mortgage whatsoever."

"Are the Muslims, as a religious organization, exempt from federal, state and other taxes?"

"Yes, we learned that this year for the first time we are now tax exempt."

"Are you willing to relax some of the rigid behavioral and dietary restrictions in order to attract more followers—somewhat similar to what the Catholic Church has been doing?"

"We are not thinking about going on such base as the Catholic people who are falling. Their religion is coming to a naught, having no power over the people. The Pope in Rome, he doesn't have any effect hardly on his immediate staff right around him. The Catholics have a *made* religion. We must have the original religion that came with the Creator. As the Holy Qu'ran teaches you, which makes sense, Allah, on the day of judgment, if you would come up with a religion other than His religion, which is entire submission to His will, why it won't be accepted."

"We haven't heard much about Black Muslim and police confrontations in recent years as we used to. Has the relationship between the Muslims and the police improved?"

"We still have clashes with police here and there in the country. But the thing that is happening now is that Allah is putting the spirit of self in the black man of America—more today than he had in them at that time. Almost from coast to coast the black man of America now wants to be black. He wants to be called black. This is the spirit of God rising in our people. It means that they are united and becoming very understandable of self and they unite together. This is what is ultimately bound to happen with American black man. He's bound to become united and he is going to be a great nation. And he is going to take the lead over other nations of the earth."

"What form will the destruction of whites, which you are prophesying, take?"

"The Holy Qu'ran says their power will be broken in wars. They will be whipped in war. Asia will defeat them. This will include all darker races on the earth."

"What is your timetable for whites' destruction?"

"They will do this within the next ten years."

"Why did you suspend Muhammad Ali (Cassius Clay) when he decided to return to the ring although you seemed to have condoned his being a fighter from the time he joined the Muslims?"

"Because I had told him at that time to stay in there (in the ring) until someone took it (the title) away from him, like he did from the other fellow (Sonny Liston). I said, 'When they throw you out of the ring, then don't fight no more.' I am opposed to all white sport and play. That was the devils' (whites') idea that we were backing Ali up for money; why we were *giving* this man (Ali) money. He didn't help us with money. We helped him to try to win and helped him try to keep his money. This is what we were doing for him and he was winning like that as long as he would keep himself inside the circle of Islam—in the faith of it. *Now* what happened? He was showing more love

**Muslim schools**, usually adjuncts of Muslim mosques, offer religious as well as academic instruction. Sticking to their tradition, Black Muslim men shun the currently "in" shaggy look of Afro-wearing dashikied black militants, instead continue to wear close-cropped hair and conservative dark suits.

for the ring of sport than he was for the circle of Islam which he had been preaching (as a Muslim minister). And I told him that he could not preach Islam and fight this sport and pray. I said, 'Get out of there!' And what made me dismiss Muhammad Ali was on these words: He said that he would return to the ring to make him a little money. 'Regardless to what principles I was to carry out in Islam,' (he said), 'I want some money.' I had told him, and he had preached it, that Allah said he would give us money, good homes, friendships and all good things of life. Well, Muhammad Ali disbelieved Him, Allah giving him money. He must go back to the devil to get some money. And has he been successful since he went back? No. He hasn't yet made any money. He doesn't get a fight."

"Will his suspension be lifted?"

"That depends on his morals, whether or not I'll overlook what he has been doing, and (whether he will) come back into the circle of Islam—whether he'll go and reform himself. Cause I've seen him on the television screen acting like a monkeyman with the other (whites) —for a little money, I guess. But Allah has plenty money for us over here. We don't have to work for the white man sport to get money."

"Have you ever thought of retiring?"

"No, not in my work. There is no retiring. I'm a divine-sent man, (divine) prepared man and (divine) guided man. That's why, without even anything like college training I am successful."

"Have you chosen a successor who one day will carry on your work?"

"Who could do my work? I am a man appointed and guided by Allah, to whom praise be forever."

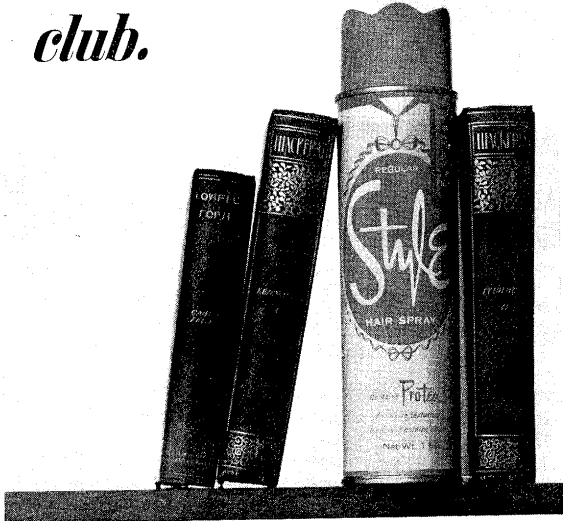
Another peal of the chimes signalled the beginning of the Messenger's next appointment and the end of my interview.

"Come and see me again—anytime," he proposed, sealing his invitation with a final double-handed clasp of my hand."

**M**OST fundamental to Black Muslim theology—and undoubtedly most skeptically received by people outside the faith—is that portion of Muhammad's teaching which deals with the "Original Man," the Black Muslim version of the Judeo-Christian genesis. Embodying some elements of the "big bang theory" of modern evolutionists, Black Muslim belief has the emergence of the "Original Man" coincide with a huge explosion of vague origin which split the earth from the moon precisely 66 trillion years ago. Thus, the "so-called Negro in America," who, the Messenger teaches, is a blood-descendant of the "Original Man," has his ancestry firmly anchored in antiquity. Whites, on the other hand, can make no such claim, having been placed on the earth only a piddling 6,000 years ago—and by a black man at that. That man was Yakub, a brilliant but evil scientist, bent on defying Allah and on destroying his fellow blacks. Yakub made the discovery that the black man could be broken down into two "germs"—one black, one brown. After mating the lighter strains until he had isolated the brown race, he went on until the red and yellow races emerged. Finally, after some 600 years of hybridizing and after filtering out all pigmentation from his human guinea pigs, he accomplished his goal—the white race.

Yakub's breakthrough, although no mean scientific achievement by anybody's standards, turned out to be little to brag about. From the Black Muslim's purely esthetic, if somewhat subjective point of view, Yakub's creations weren't much to look at. In the Messenger's words, "they were really pale white, with really blue eyes, which we think are the ugliest of colors for a human eye." Still worse, it appeared that by "grafting" out his creatures' color, Yakub had also filtered out their very soul or humanity. "They were called Caucasian," the Messenger explains, "which means, according to some of the Arab scholars, 'one whose evil effect is not confined to one's self alone, but affects others.'" Consequently, the blue-eyed devils with which Yakub had peopled the earth were—and are to this day—inferior physically and mentally and totally bereft of ennobling human emotions such as love, honesty, unselfishness, courage and compassion. The Messenger has no difficulty finding examples in European and U.S. white history and in current events to buttress his assertion of white-Christian depravity. Only in technical matters, which he terms "tricknology," does he concede a temporary white edge.

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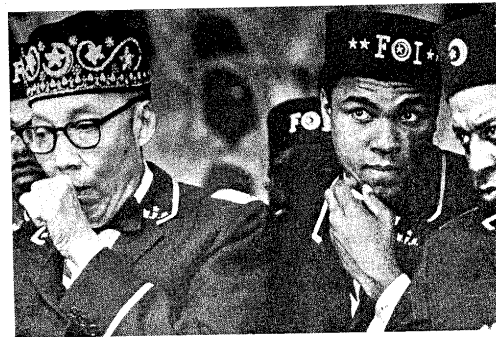
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Ousted Muslim VIPs, Muhammad Ali (c.) and John Ali (no relation), are seen with their leader during more harmonious times. Breaking of Muslims' rigid behavioral code is subject to stringent disciplinary measures, the most severe form of which is total ostracism.

**Elijah Muhammad Continued**

AN important aspect of Black Muslim life is the observance of dietary laws laid down by the Messenger in his 132-page book, *How To Eat and Live*. "As Truth cannot be purchased," an inscription on the inside of the book's dust cover reads, "this book is a gift to you in exchange for your contribution of \$2.00 which will be used to build a much needed educational center in Chicago." The inscription closes, somewhat paradoxically, with "May God bless every purchaser of this book." Except for the Black Muslims' (and Orthodox Muslims') most religiously observed prohibition concerning the eating of pork, most of the other dietary rules mentioned in the book are offered as health hints whose observance is left up to the individual believer. Those of Muhammad's followers who have not yet conquered their appetite for "hog" may be tempted to do so after reading that "he (the hog) is so poisonous (99.9 per cent) that you can hardly poison him with other poison. He is so poisonous and filthy that nature had to prepare him a sewer line and you may find the opening on his forelegs. It is a little hole out of which oozes pus. This is the filth of his body that cannot be passed fast enough." If the foregoing has failed to turn off lovers of pork chops, ribs, bacon, ham and chitterlings, they may want to consider the Messenger's final point on the subject, namely that "the swine eaters are always ready to rise up for a dispute and fight other people and among themselves."

Warning that "we will dig our own graves with our teeth," Muhammad commands his followers to eat only one meal a day and to fast at least three days once every month. "The more idle our stomachs are, the longer they will last. The more we tax our stomach, the sooner it wears out," he explains, adding, "Allah desires to extend our lives from a short span averaging 62 years to a span of 1,000 years—or for as long as we desire to live. He said there is no set time for us to die. We kill ourselves daily by means of what we think, what we eat and what we drink."

There is only one group outside the Muslim faith of whose fastidious food habits the Messenger approves—the Jews. Although that is where, in view of his open sympathies with the Islamic Arab world, his admiration for anything Jewish ends, he concedes that "Jews are the only people whose food we can eat and who, in turn, can eat our food."

THE major tools the white devils have used, and are using in keeping blacks divided and in submission and slavery, according to Muhammad, are Christianity and the Bible or "poison book." Although he frequently quotes from it, allowing that it holds "some truth," he insists the bible has been rendered virtually useless for blacks because whites have been "tampering with its truth to make it to suit themselves." What better protection could the slavemasters have found, he asks, than to teach poor blacks, "Him who smiteth thee on one cheek offer the other cheek?"

When stripped of its religious and mystical doctrines, Muhammad's unique blend of black nationalism, black capitalism

and black socialism emerges as one of the most viable, common-sense approaches to the classic ills of black ghetto life. It is an approach which many have criticized, but whose results no one has been able to surpass or even match. Some of these critics assert condescendingly that the "uneducated" Messenger has little, if any, influence among members of the black middle class, that his greatest appeal is among poor and semi-literate blacks. Their observation seems accurate enough, but instead of pointing up a weakness, as intended, it focuses on what perhaps is Muhammad's greatest strength. For where—if not among the poor and dispossessed—is the greatest need for rehabilitation and reform? By really reaching the poor, the "uneducated" Muhammad is upstaging the entire professional anti-poverty establishment.

The Messenger's growing success bears a direct, though inverse relationship with the failure of both black and white leadership to come to grips with ghetto problems. By and large, that leadership's efforts have been characterized by a rash of "action programs" that are far too frequently either all program without action or all action without any program to follow up. Muhammad offers his followers both, a program and intensive action to make it work. He not only "delivers," but his ability to do so is not dependent on white concessions. While black integrationists must mince their words, fearful that "telling it like it is" might jeopardize their objectives, Muhammad boldly calls the shots as he sees them—and then some. The source of his boldness, apart from the religious convictions he holds, is the fact that Muslims do not ask for favors. Whatever they want, they buy. Not only are Muslims paying their own way, they are doing so with interest and mortgage-free cash—the dollars they have scrimped and saved, often on low-paying, menial jobs, by giving up such expensive vices as gambling, smoking, drinking and dope. Thus, with undetermined millions flowing into the Muslim coffers from their enterprises and intra-organizational fund-raising drives, Muhammad's programs are totally self-contained, depending more on the standing of the U. S. dollars than on fluctuating liberal impulses of whites. Since he can always count on white devils' yen for a buck, Muhammad is practically assured white cooperation when he needs it, as long as he has the wherewithal.

While a good deal of the Messenger's efforts are concentrated on long-range goals, the payoff to those who accept his beliefs is almost instantaneous. The alcoholic who gives up booze, the criminal who denounces crime, the dope addict who kicks the habit, the gambler who swears off gambling and takes a steady job, each reaps immediate dividends in the form of a general improvement of his health and life style—logical consequences of having put an end to his self-destructive behavior. But most importantly, Muhammad gives those who turn to him self-respect, dignity and a life free of wants, not in an uncertain, distant hereafter, but here on earth and RIGHT NOW and, what's more, without the Christian obligation of loving their enemies.

THE skies were conspicuously void of new stars at the arrival of Allah's last prophet on this planet on Oct. 7, 1897. He was



Before break with Messenger in 1964, Malcolm X (r., beside Chicago minister James Shabazz) was patriarch's most vocal supporter. Official rift occurred after Mecca pilgrimage convinced brother Malcolm that "true Islam is incompatible with racism."

Continued on Next Page



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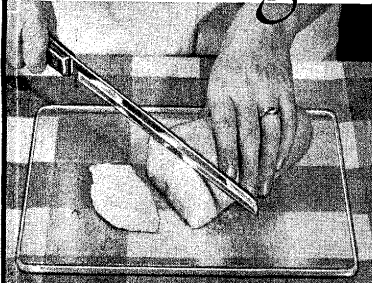
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### Elijah Muhammad *Continued*

born, inauspiciously enough, one of 12 children of a sharecropper who wrested less than a living from a dusty cotton patch near Sandersville, Ga. Along with the biblical name "Elijah," he was given the somewhat prosaic family name "Poole." The latter he was to denounce vehemently as a "slave name" following his spiritual awakening as a young adult.

The prophet-to-be met his destiny in August 1930 in the person of a mysterious silk peddler of obscure origins who called himself variously Wali Farrad, W. D. Fard and Farrad Mohammad. Besides selling silks and exotic artifacts in Detroit's black community, he held secret meetings at which he fascinated his listeners with stories from the Holy Qu'ran and by exhorting them to throw off the shackles of the "blue-eyed devils" and to fulfill their promise as rulers of the earth.

"He didn't have to tell me that He was Allah," recalls the Messenger. "When I first met Him, I knew Him. I recognized Him. And right there I told Him that He was the one the world had been looking for to come." The Messenger explains that the stranger admitted but asked him not to reveal His divinity "till He could teach me, so I could teach the others. Then He put me over the whole thing—the whole nation. He made me the head of the black man in America."

The informal teach-ins held by Master Fard—as his followers called him—gave rise to a sect, the Nation of Islam, which grew steadily, partly because of the evangelistic zeal of Fard's chief disciple—Elijah Muhammad.

On March 19, 1934, Muhammad recalls, Master Fard disappeared as mysteriously as he had come, without leaving a trace and without ever being seen or heard of again. "He just left," remembers the Messenger, "natural, like a friend leaving another friend." Before long, the cult was torn by dissension resulting from a power struggle between Muhammad and several brothers who found his story a little too difficult to believe. "One year after Master Fard left me," Muhammad recalls, "I had to leave Detroit; the enemies, hypocrites united together to drive me out and I had to come here (Chicago) and later they came here. They united to drive me out of here and kill me and I fled to the East Coast where I stayed seven years. I ended up spending five years in the penitentiary (Federal Penitentiary in Milan, Mich.) for refusing to serve in the Army—that's the excuse they had. I already was too old. I was 45 years old at the time." Muhammad explains that he does not expect his believers to follow his example and refuse to be drafted. "I don't ask them not to (serve); that's up to them after I teach them the truth."

The post-war years, following his release from jail in 1946, found Muhammad firmly entrenched as leader of his group. It was a period marked by quiet, yet steady growth that went largely unnoticed, or at least unreported, by the press. The latter had long since shrugged off Muslim militancy as rhetoric, something to be pitied rather than feared. This attitude changed suddenly with the rise within the sect's hierarchy of a brilliant young spell-binder named Malcolm X. As chief spokesman of the Messenger, brother Malcolm was soon accorded the respect and coverage due the most militant and most revolutionary personality of his time. While Malcolm defiantly offered to meet white violence with black violence, the number of Muslim followers and sympathizers swelled—but so did the number of Muslim enemies. Before long, white hysteria about the "subversive" sect had spread like croup. Muslim shootings and killings by trigger-happy police became the order of the day, offering a preview of what was in store for another, yet to be born, black militant group.

**T**HE most crucial blow Muhammad and his movement has suffered so far has been brother Malcolm's defection and subsequent assassination in 1965, events which tore the movement into two hostile, frequently armed camps. Although the two convicted assassins have been vaguely identified as Muslims, Muhammad has steadfastly denied official Muslim involvement in the killing. There are still many young black militants who, having chosen brother Malcolm as their idol, are plagued by doubts about the Muslims' role in their martyr's death. But most



of the suspicion and innuendos have subsided and Black Muslim popularity among the young is again on the rise.

For the most part, it is a popularity based on young black militants' sneaking suspicion that they did not invent the word "black" after all, and that—as a matter of fact—they are just beginning to catch up with what the frail little patriarch has been teaching and preaching for the last 30 years. They cannot escape the realization that long before most of them were born, the Messenger taught "the so-called American Negro" to begin thinking and acting black, to study his black past and culture and to put an end to his cringing, abortive efforts at "aping the white man" in order to receive the latter's "approved-for-integration" seal. Black youths of today admire the Messenger for his fearless verbal attacks on racist white America, for the immense pride in blackness which he instills in his followers, and because he speaks their language, or rather because they are beginning to speak his. But is a common language sufficient motivation for young blacks to flock to the temples of Islam? All indicators point toward a "not likely" reply. Although the Muslims are tightlipped about membership—whether out of fear of revealing their weakness or their real strength—it is not difficult to conclude that young blacks are not turning to Islam in sufficiently significant numbers to signal a national trend. A 23-year-old Chicagoan who describes himself as a militant seems to sum up the reason: "I think what the Muslims are doing is real cool. I mean takin' care of business the way they do, but I can't go along with that *salaam alaikum* bag they're in and with that 'you can't do this and you can't do that' routine. Man I got to do my own thing, dig?" Whatever young black's "own thing" is, it is apparent that it is largely bent on more secular expressions, unencumbered by religious dogma and ascetic abstinence within the ever-present restraints of an autocracy.

Thus, despite the Black Muslim's spectacular success in establishing themselves as a viable movement that can count on the sympathies—if not outright support—of a broad spectrum of the black community, the future of the organization seems uncertain at best. With Malcolm X, the one-time heir-apparent (though never heir-designate) gone, and with the aging Muhammad refusing to groom and name a successor, nobody (perhaps not even those closest to the Messenger) knows what will happen to the Black Muslims once Allah's last prophet is gone.

Meanwhile, the Muslim rank and file exhibit no anxiety about the survival of their movement. And why should they? Has not the Messenger prophesied that Allah will destroy the white devils within the next decade? They are confident that, once the prophesy has come to pass, the black man will be restored to his original role as "the first and the last, and the maker and owner of the universe."

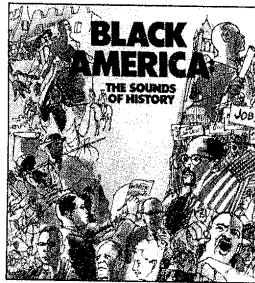
*Allah wa'akbar* (God is almighty).



Mentally alert and perpetually busy despite his frail health and advancing age, Messenger devotes all of his energies to the realization of his dream of an economically and politically independent nation of American blacks. His failure to name a successor has cast doubts on the future of the Black Muslim movement.

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