

Emam tells New York audience

'Identify with America!'

By Khatira Ishq Hikmah and Salim Muwakkil

NEW YORK — Urging listeners to identify with America in order to change it, Emam Wallace D. Muhammad, leader of the World Community of Islam in the West (WCIW), addressed an overflow audience in Madison Square Garden's Felt Forum, and several thousands more via WNET-TV.

"We need to look at America, at what we're doing and then look at what is needed and then reorder this world to serve the real human needs," Emam Muhammad declared.

"You have to identify with this nation," he added. "You can't live in America and grow unless you identify as a person with this land. You can't go out there thinking this is a white man's land and make progress in this country, you have to go out there knowing that this is your land."

Speaking forcefully, Emam Muhammad briefly recounted both the positive and negative aspects of the Nation of Islam.

Although the Honorable Elijah Muhammad "taught that we should feel for each other and love each other, in the early 1960's there was another development going on that eventually became so powerful as an influence that it killed the original sensitive, compassionate spirit that existed in our community.

"The members became insensitive to each other's needs and became cold toward each other," Emam Muhammad explained. The cause of this, he noted, was the refusal of Nation of Islam members to place emphasis on the right things.

"We left first things. The first things, according to the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, was that we should believe in Almighty God and we should be righteous people. He said we should be servants, obedient followers and believers in God and put nothing before our God," Emam Muhammad explained.

"But then this new development became strong and the emphasis was on 'get the money' ... 'get the money' he recounted.

Placing the Nation of Islam and the teachings of Master Elijah Muhammad in historical perspective, Emam Muhammad chided those who wished to return to the "good old days."

"If you want the good old days you don't want me as a leader," he admonished. "I want the good new days."

At the same time, though, he reminded the enthusiastic audience that he was not suggesting they reject any good habits they may have formed during the "First Resurrection" (the initial stage in the development of Al-Islam in the West).

"I'm not telling you to throw away any good thing you got from the past," he said. "If the teachings of Elijah Muhammad made you industrious, I want you to stay industrious."



EMAM W.D. MUHAMMAD addressing television audience and capacity crowd at Madison Square Garden's Felt Forum.

(Photo by Peter Franklin)

Emam Muhammad pointed out that the religion of Al - Islam "does not allow a Muslim to spend his whole life in prayer and neglect his home life.

"A Muslim must develop his home life and improve upon the condition of his family," he noted, emphasizing the fact that the Quran prescribes a complete life, balancing spiritual and material concerns.

"Study the history of Prophet Muhammad. Do you think Prophet Muhammad led people to pray and they didn't do anything about their physical condition?"

"They prayed and they improved upon the physical condition of their society. So much so, that in a period of about 20 years the peninsular of Arabia took on a complete new face," he said.

"Poor people who were denied and had no opportunity to better their lives came into knowledge, understanding and material progress. They were a people who were so backward, so much in the Dark Ages, but they rose upon receiving the message of the Quran from Prophet Muhammad to become the torch-bearers of light.

"Not only spiritual light but also scientific light ... It was the message of the Quran that gave rebirth to the love for knowledge, science, for community development and for governmental strength," Emam Muhammad articulately noted.

EDITORIAL COMMENTARY

Throughout the televised portion of the Emam's moving address, New York Times reporter Paul Delaney (the media's "Muslim expert") was questioned by Sandra King, a reporter for the Newark (N.J.) Star Ledger on his opinion of the changes within the WCIW.

Though Delaney demonstrated a superficial knowledge of the WCIW, it was clear to most observers that he apparently delighted in focusing on what he perceived as negative aspects of its development.

When asked by reported King about

a previous observation he made concerning the class identification of WCIW members, Delaney responded, "He (Emam Muhammad) has attracted more middle - class, intellectual blacks who do not express themselves as demonstratively as lower class blacks the religion previously attracted.

"...for example," Delaney said, "the recruiting from the prisons, prostitutes, pimps, etc., that Elijah Muhammad built the religion on," is no longer going on.

This, journalist Delaney noted, despite the fact that Emam Muhammad has consistently focused on prison populations. He has spoken within the walls of several prisons and from all objective indications, the prison membership of the WCIW is at an all-time high.

But such misperceptions (be they intentional or simply due to ignorance and sloppy journalism) are common when it comes to reporting on the WCIW.

In a direct reference to this type of reporting on the movement of Al-Islam in the West, Emam Muhammad said, "Sometimes I

wonder if opening our doors really helped the outside world to see in on us.

"When I hear what is being said on the outside, I sometimes feel the world still knows little what goes on inside the walls of the WCIW," he added. "I feel they care little about what goes on because I hear negative things about us and I know of nothing negative happening."

Emam Muhammad urged the audience to loose their identification with symbolic things. He said he grew his beard to make people "accept change."

"You who identify with the World Community of Islam in the West and say you follow the Chief Emam, when you see me wearing this beard, you are forced to think of change.

"Some of our people became so dependent on empty language, empty ideas, empty concepts and symbolism. That if I don't wear this beard, if I come out here with a close haircut, no hair on my face, a black bow - tie... I just can't reach people that have to be reached in that look.

Awarded proclamation and scoutmastership

Editor's note: "I want to pay tribute to a Man of Consequence" Percy Sutton, Borough President echoed. Upon hearing that the Hon. Wallace D. Muhammad would be in New York he issued a proclamation which read as follows:

Whereas, the Borough of Manhattan in the City of New York is a place where people come from all over the world.

Whereas the Borough of Manhattan is a place of many religions, many cultures, of many people from many different backgrounds, where on the occasions they come to this city, giants from other places,

men who stand tall not just in the city of New York but in the community of this world and, Whereas, on the twentieth of June in the year 1977, a successor of another giant, the successor of the giant known as the Hon. Elijah Muhammad, the successor, the Hon. Wallace D. Muhammad, the esteemed leader of the World Community of Islam in the West has come to the City of New York to bring his message to the many people who need a message.

Emam Muhammad was also awarded a plaque as Scoutmaster for Islamic Boy Scouts in New York City.