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The Ways of Islam

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*In the Name of Allah, The
Beneficent, The Merciful*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

"It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."

—W.E.B. DuBois

"The question, then, is posed whether this unparalleled alienation and our partial entrance into what is termed the mainstream of American life precludes our exploration of our identity as a minority of African descent and our recourse to the African heritage as a fructifying source of our creative endeavor."

—Samuel W. Allen

By Genevieve Ekaete

They said it in different ways but they both said the same thing: that for many there is an emptiness which goes along with being an American of African descent. Many have filled this spiritual void with Islam and it works for them.

It is not hard to see why Islam is getting increasingly popular to Black Americans. Islam believes in "an eye for an eye" rather than the "turn the other cheek" philosophy of Christianity. While Islam cautions that Muslims should never be aggressors, it implores Muslim victims of aggression to retaliate. That is a welcome change for Blacks in this country who have turned the other cheek too often too long.

The only criterion for comparison allowed in Islam is the degree of one's righteousness. This is refreshing to Black Americans, a people whose former frame of reference was "white" or "Black."

Add to that the fact that Islamic theology is simpler than Judaic or Christian theology. Very strictly monotheistic, Islam holds fast to its basic belief that there is

ten and has not begotten any children. Jesus Christ is regarded as just another Prophet.

Another attraction for Blacks in Islam is the fact that this religion does not permit pictorial representation of God and His Prophets. That way, no one race can claim a monopoly on God and His Prophets. There are no picture-images of Prophet Muhammad, who is said to have received the words of the Quran, the holy book of Muslims, from God and gone on to establish the Islamic religion about 1,400 years ago. Muslims abhor the fact that supposed photographs of Jesus Christ abound in the West. They also believe that the existence of photographs and statues of holy men and women encourage idolatry.

Minister Abdul Haleem Farrakhan, the spokesman for the Nation of Islam, in a recent speech at Howard University explained how Blacks in America have been psyched out at the altar of Christianity.

"Let me show you the height of a racist mentality. He (white man) says 'God is a spirit so you can't see him. If you see him you will die. And you can't see him until you die.' Since nobody wants to die, nobody wants to check out the father.

"Then he (white man) slips in the back door and says, 'But dig it, Father had a son.' Well, if I can't see the father I'll be so happy to see the son because the son is from the father. The catch is: the father is the spirit and the son is flesh.

"They didn't have cameras in the days of Jesus. All of a sudden he (white man) paints a picture out of his mind and he paints Jesus blond hair, blue eyes, white skin and then he hangs it on a cross and says 'This is your savior. He died for you.' He hangs there real pitiful looking. This invokes sympathy in us.

"See what your clever enemy has done. He took white flesh and through subliminal seduction, he puts it on a cross and here is what he was telling you, 'You can't see the father but here's the son. The son is white.' So, subtly he was suggesting to your subconscious mind

that white is godly, white is pure, white is clean, white is ethereal. It is metaphysical—out of the physical into the realm of the angelic.

"So in your subconscious mind when you see white skin you automatically begin to melt because you are looking at God's people."

There are anywhere between one and three million Muslims in the United States,

according to one source. In Washington, D.C., there is the Nation of Islam, the Islamic Party in North America, some minor cleavages here and there, along with an internationally-oriented Islamic Center. They have one thing in common: increasing membership.

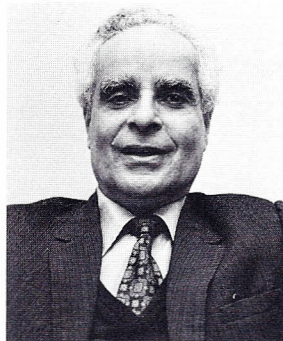
But when one thinks of Muslims in the U.S. and in Washington, it is the Nation of Islam that immediately comes to one's mind. The Nation, as it is called for short, founded since 1930 by its late spiritual leader, Elijah Muhammad, has gained a lot of respectability. With more than 80 temples around the country, 46 universities of Islam and schools for Muslims, thousands of acres of farm land and a financial empire whose worth is said to hover around \$80 million, its respectability is well in order.

Watched closely by critics as well as prospective converts, the activities of the Nation seem close to the heart of most people.

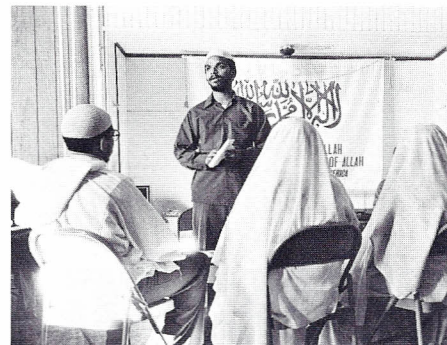
When the Nation relaxed its dress code for women (women no longer have to wear uniforms. They can even wear pants), *non-Muslim* Black women as well as Muslims applauded. They applauded, too, the appointment of women ministers.

When the Nation recently opened its doors to whites ("though whites are not breaking down the door to get into the temple"—Farrakhan), many *non-Muslim* Blacks as well as Muslims felt that the only thing they have all to themselves would no longer be solely theirs.

But obviously the Nation has no choice since, under the leadership of Supreme Minister Wallace D. Muhammad, it is deliberately moving closer to Muslim



Dr. Muhammad Abdul Rauf



Ahmed Abdullah

12 orthodoxy. The fact that it is emphasizing the teachings of the Quran and has dropped all references to whites as "devils" proves this.

Minister Farrakhan has the responsibility for explaining the shift of stance of the Nation. To a packed Cramton Auditorium audience he explained that Elijah Muhammad came to Black people in 1930 when the Black mind was as lowly as the beast's. Elijah Muhammad couldn't take the holy Quran and give it to the Black mind in its pristine stage then, he said. "It is too much light for a man who's totally in the dark. It is cruel to bring a man out of total darkness into total light. You'll blind him forever.

"When the dawn strikes on the eastern horizon, you don't see pure light. You see light mixed with darkness. And then the higher and the brighter the light gets, the more darkness disappears until the darkness is gone completely and all that's left is a pure shining light."

Similarly, he contends that when you have an ignorant people as students you must wean them away with light mixed with darkness. The light is the Quran. "The Quran doesn't teach color. But Elijah Muhammad said the white man is a devil. When we looked at white folks we saw the embodiment of sin, evil, decadence, murder, lying. Elijah Muhammad knew then that not all white people were like that. But when you are rearing children you can't tell them that some snakes are poisonous and some are not. We in the Nation have now put down the childishness of racism."

This recanting is not good enough for at least one segment of the Muslim community, specifically, The Islamic Party in North America, which is feuding with the Nation over whether or not the Nation's members can be called Muslims. In fact, they insist, as long as members of the Nation continue to believe that God appeared in the person of W. Fard Muhammad to the late Elijah Muhammad in 1930, they are not Muslims. Further, they say the late Elijah Muhammad's claim that he

was a divine Messenger of God put him at variance with Islamic theology which states that Islam's founder, Muhammad-ibn-Abdullah of Arabia, was Allah's last Messenger. So the argument continues in the Nation's weekly, *Bilalian News* (formerly *Muhammad Speaks*), and *al-Islam*, the newspaper of the Islamic Party. Theologically, the Islamic Party stands on solid grounds. The Quran quotes Allah as saying, "Muhammad (ibn-Abdullah) is not the father of any man among you, but he is the Messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets. . . ."

The Islamic Party is too doctrinaire in trying to determine who will or will not be called Muslim.

But the director of the Islamic Center in Washington, Dr. Muhammad Abdul Rauf, an orthodox Muslim from Egypt who at the age of eight (like most devout Muslim children) had memorized the entire Quran, doesn't think that another human being has the right to yank the name Muslim from anyone. In fact, he sees members of the Nation as orthodox Muslims and sometimes worships with them in their temple. He, however, doesn't believe that Fard was Allah and Elijah Muhammad, Allah's Messenger. And he explained the reason for his tolerance of other Muslims:

"Among American Muslims, Blacks or white, as well as among immigrant Muslims of any color, you have people of better knowledge than others. So if you have among American Muslims some people of lesser knowledge, I don't like to call them unorthodox or to mark them off as a different group."

Dr. Rauf has noticed that Muslims in the U.S. make quite an effort to observe the five "pillars of Islam" which are: the profession of faith, praying five times a day, giving alms to the poor, fasting during the month of Ramadan and making a pilgrimage to Mecca, Islam's holy city, by those who have the means.

He has noticed other Islamic traits in members of the Nation: "They aspire to improve their conditions, to lead a decent

life and undertake certain economic projects in the interest of the community. They seem to maintain clean houses. All these are features of Islam."

During an interview with Ahmed Abdullah, an official of the Islamic Party whose temple is located on Park Road and Sherman Avenue in northwest Washington, Abdullah never looked me in the eyes. I called his attention to it, not quite sure what it meant.

"The etiquette of a Muslim is that the man doesn't look into the eyes of a woman and a woman doesn't look into the eyes of a man. It's a form of modesty. It's a form of respect for you that I am not leering at you," he explained, thus painting a picture of belonging to one of the strictest Muslim groups anywhere.

The Islamic Party is five years old in the U.S., and Abdullah has been its follower since. He is 27-years-old and the father of five children, and drives a cab for a living. "Driving a cab has helped to spread the message. Many of our brothers drive cabs and that has been a way of reaching the people."

Asked why he became a Muslim, Abdullah replied that he had seen a correlation between people's suffering and their beliefs, traditions and lifestyles. So he began to investigate the different beliefs and lifestyles. "When I investigated Islam, I saw that the Islamic ideology had every solution—both personal and collective—to meet the needs of the suffering masses throughout the world."

He claims that Islam is only in its beginning stages in the West. "Our objective is to make Islam a household word. Our primary objective is the establishment of Islam in its entirety." He sees interests in Islam growing because "people are searching for comprehensive truth because there are too many half truths." The only figure he would give on the membership of his organization is, "we are in thousands."

It is noon on a chilly November Friday and Abdullah has invited me to the Friday noon prayer which all adult male Mus-

Members of Islamic Party



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lms are obligated to attend. About 60 men and some of their male children take their seats on a bare carpeted floor behind the *imam* who leads the prayer. The women—about a dozen of them—all covered from head to toe except for the slit near the eyes through which they see, sit at the back of the mosque with their female children.

Dr. Rauf had explained earlier that Muslim women sit away from their men in prayer so that all can concentrate on the prayer. The women sit *behind* the men so that while going through the motions of kneeling and prostrating in prayer, they will not capture the attention of the men.

I saw this as a relegation of women to a subservient role and recalled that in legal situations, Islamic law demands that the parties involved have either two male witnesses or one male and two women. Dr. Rauf told me unconvincingly that this doesn't imply that two women equal one man. He quoted unnamed psychologists as having said women's memories cannot be trusted because chemical hormonal changes take place in their bodies every month. "Therefore it happens occasionally that women are not in full control of their mental faculty. And in order to protect the rights of people, the Quran says 'Let there be two women so that if one forgets, the other will remind her.'"

After the prayer, Tahirah, Abdullah's wife (though Islamic law allows women to retain their maiden name after marriage, all the ones I talked to took their husband's names), explained why she was wearing solid black clothing with all her body, except her eyes, covered. "Islam says only the husband should reap the beauty of a woman. So I cover my body and my face since the face is the most beautiful part of the body."

Her mode of dressing keeps down immorality and jealousy, she added, and then pointed out how their men wear a dark green uniform so that they can be



Minister Khalil Abdel Alim

14 recognized as members of the Islamic Party.

When I told this friendly and gracious woman that I wasn't a Muslim, she seemed amazed: "You couldn't possibly be contented without doing your duty to the creator?"

"We Muslims feel at peace," she continued. "We feel a contentment. As soon as I accepted Islam I felt no need to be intoxicated or high. We feel overjoyed for worshipping our creator."

She said the Muslim woman has an enviable position. Islam liberated her and "the law of Allah says that the man takes care of the woman. I get love and security from my husband."

She then took my hand and led me into a private room where she removed her outer garment revealing a beautiful black "Pakistani pants"—pants whose cuffs are held by elastic—a black see-through blouse and an embroidered tunic over it. She had made her point: the Muslim woman, according to her group at least, is supposed to be attractive to her husband at home. She wears the outer garment over everything when out in public.

Many orthodox Muslims who are well-versed in the Quran believe the method used by the Islamic Party in adhering to the Muslim faith is extreme and bordering on the fanatical. They say that Muslims are expected to acquire such sophistication and discipline that it shouldn't be a continuing battle to function in the midst of regularly clothed women who are not one's wives. They maintain that the Quran does not require women to cover their face with a piece of cloth or veil. A Persian custom, said Dr. Suleyman Nyang, former director of the Department of African Studies at Howard, which Prophet Muhammad, a feminist in his day, opposed vigorously.

Dr. Rauf, like Dr. Nyang, belongs to the school which believes that wearing cumbersome clothing is not a requisite for holiness or righteousness. "Wearing a veil over the face among Muslim women

used to be a status symbol in some societies. Ladies of high classes, when they went out in public covered their faces with a veil. Then the custom spread in some localities as a result of this."

Yet a segment of the orthodox Muslims do not see anything wrong with the fanaticism of any group of American Muslims. They think it is needed at the beginning of any social movement. After all, many considered the Nation of Islam fanatical at the beginning.

Scholar Eric Hoffer considers fanatics crucial to every mass movement. "A movement is pioneered by men of words, materialized by fanatics and consolidated by men of action," he says in his book, *The True Believer*. He states further: "When the moment is ripe, only the fanatic can hatch a genuine mass movement. Without him the disaffection engendered by militant men of words remains undirected and can vent itself only in pointless and easily suppressed disorders. Without him the initiated reforms, even when drastic, leave the old way of life unchanged, and any change in government usually amounts to no more than a transfer of power from one set of men of action to another. Without him there can perhaps be no new beginning."

In Muhammad's Temple of Islam Number 4 in northwest Washington, I was searched by a diminutive woman who incorrectly but pleasantly called me "Geneva" while she turned my large handbag upside down. I had come to interview the minister, and for a while after the search I seemed forgotten in a corner where young students milled around me before settling into their classes. A bell rang for prayers and, as if from nowhere, a stout man appeared to my left and without uttering any words beckoned on me to follow him. A young thin woman to my right told me not to move: "Stand where you are until the prayers are over," she said. I followed the silent man. At the entrance of a shed-like structure, he held the door in one hand and nodded for me to enter. Hating

to change the format, I nodded my thank you to him.

I took a chair opposite Minister Khalil Abdel Alim whose duties include teaching the message of Allah, supervising the temple and school, counseling the members on family and financial matters, and officiating at marriage rites.

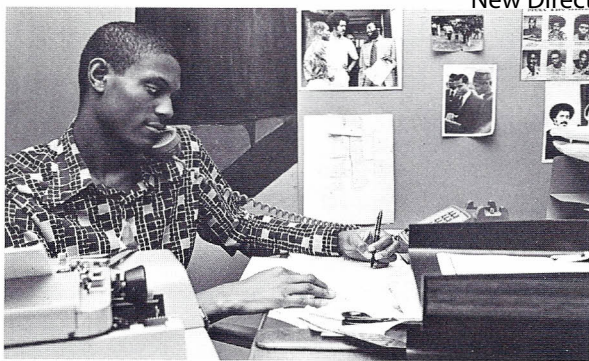
Minister Alim explained the reason for the latest name change of members of the Nation. According to Chief Minister Wallace D. Muhammad, all Black Americans and Blacks in Western Europe are now to be known as Bilalians. This is meant to finally bring an end to the confusion over what Blacks in this country will be called. Minister Alim explained the problem the new name came to rectify: "To call us American is not correct. To call us Black is not adequate. Negro is not accepted by most Blacks since it was given to us as slaves. We are not a colored people. Colored means someone has colored you."

Lonnie Kashif, Washington Bureau Chief of the *Bilalian News*, the Nation's weekly newspaper with a circulation of 900,000, had earlier explained why the name Bilal was chosen. Bilal, an African slave from Ethiopia, was one of the first followers of Prophet Muhammad, he had said. The first *muezzin* (one who calls the faithful to prayer) and a minister of Islam, Bilal was known as Master—a very high Islamic title.

According to Kashif, "This connection makes Bilal the best type of imagery for Black Americans. Our identity with Bilal connects us with the African continent as well as our spiritual inheritance. By calling ourselves Bilalians we carry his name on through history. His deeds will be remembered."

Since Islam does not encourage the distinction among the faithful being based on race or color, strict adherents to the faith already have something to grumble about.

Whereas Muslim Nations in Africa and the East strive to blend the state's religion into its political machinery, the Nation shuns organized politics. The



Editor Hodari Ali

reason given is that it doesn't believe that the political system of this country will deal with the problems facing Blacks—problems caused by the white social system.

"Bilalians have to develop their own systems and try to solve their own problems. But we are very political in that we work daily dealing with the problems of the community," said Minister Alim.

Members of the Nation refuse to go to war for the United States, and many have gone to jail for that decision. Again Minister Alim explained the principle behind that decision: "We are opposed to fighting a war against a people who are not our enemy. We had nothing to gain from fighting the Vietnamese."

Increasingly, Islam in the U.S. is beginning to appeal not only to the poor and wretched ex-cons that made up the early converts of the Nation, but college students and some professionals as well. At Howard University, for example, the editor of the student newspaper, *The Hilltop*, is a Muslim. Editor Hodari Ali maintains that his being a Muslim influences the paper only to the extent that "I have to make judgments based on my experience and belief." There now appears an occasional column on Islam in *The Hilltop*. Ali said that is only because a lot of people asked for it.

Asked why college students are flocking to Islam, Kashif, a Muslim for 20 years, explained that students are looking for order, direction and some sense of purpose and balance in their lives. During the past decade, he pointed out, there has been a general malaise and lack of meaning of life throughout the country. And when the students choose to belong to the Nation, it satisfies their physical needs, emotional cravings and their thirst for knowledge, he said.

Minister Alim believes college students, like anyone else, have a good deal to gain from the Nation. "The Nation gives an identity to the individual. It creates a sense of family and provides jobs." This is in addition to the fact that

the culture that is blamed for most of their problems.

Yet Minister Alim insists on being cautious about what looks like a mass conversion of students. "Students are very fickle," he said. "They will get excited about something temporarily. Many of them don't belong to any particular Muslim group because they shy away from responsibility." Although Islam insists that every Muslim be part of a Muslim community, many of the converted students interviewed did not read that to mean they must join any one sect or group. Rather, they believed that they meet that requirement by having some Muslim friends.

In general, students, when they speak, sound sincere but because of the inconvenience of trying to meet Islamic demands in a predominantly Christian society lapse in their duties to Allah. None of those interviewed prayed five times a day as required. Many made do with praying silently as they went about their secular concerns. And the work arrangements in the U.S. do little to help.

"The holy day of Islam is Friday. Sometimes when I want to go to the Islamic Center on Friday, I can't go because it's a school day," said Ali who became a Muslim and husband to Mayimuna Tafuta, in Washington's Malcolm X Park on May 24, 1975, the African Liberation Day. Both took their religious and marriage vows at the same time.

The couple follows a Muslim lifestyle: doesn't drink alcohol, smoke tobacco, eat pork or dance. Islam prohibits the eating of pork among its adherents because the pig is considered filthy. It prohibits intoxicants and Western-style dances because they overly stimulate the senses and under their influences one is likely to sin or disobey the laws of Islam.

Muslims noticeably have a strong sense of identity, regardless of their sect.

Men and women don't have their roles mixed up. Ibrahim Mahdi, a Washington plants salesman and the father of five children, shoed many Muslim men when he said:

"It is not good enough to be a man and a father of children. The responsibilities that go along with being a man and father, the moral obligation that Islam teaches must be assumed by the Muslim man."

The Muslim woman indisputably recognizes her husband as the head of the household. All the married Muslim women who agreed to be interviewed first got permission from their husbands. Women's liberation has no foothold here.

In trying to locate the types of men and women who are attracted to Islam, one couple—Sulaiman and Zehraa'a Ul Mahdi—came closest to being composites.

Dressed in a long stripped cotton hooded dress, Zehraa'a, a published poet and secretary at Howard, sported a nose ring and occasionally covered her head with the hood—a move which immediately transformed her into the picture of Lynette ("Squeaky") Fromme every time. She didn't have much to fuss about in the living room of the one-bedroom apartment she occupies with her husband because the major piece of furniture in the room was a large black and white Persian rug. The only pretense at a chair was a single-bed size mattress in one corner covered with a black and white checkered print. After dutifully waiving the opportunity to speak first to her husband, Zehraa'a eventually spoke about the forces that led her into being a Muslim.

The out-of-wedlock child of a white woman and a Black father, Zehraa'a who has never known her real parents, was adopted by a fairly well-to-do Black couple in Lynchburg, Va. As a child she went with her parents to the Catholic Church where they were the only Black family. Zehraa'a noticed very early that the same Christian spirit that was extended to other whites was never extended to her family.

She also noticed a hypocrisy among members of the church. "They would sit up there for one hour and preach one thing, then do another the next. You greet

16 them after church and they act as if you have a disease.”

Frustrated, she started going to the Baptist church which was all Black. That wasn't satisfying either because the Baptists too, like the Catholics, would preach one thing and do another. And she, meanwhile, was dedicated to pursuing the truth.

That's when she ran away from home at the age of 15 and came to live in Washington, where she lied about her age, landed jobs and started going to the Holiness church.

That offered no relief so she went to the Buddhist church where she stayed for two years. She was intellectually stimulated there by the Law of Karma and other properties of Buddha. “Then they insisted there wasn't any God but certain forces. That's when I became frustrated because I had always believed there was a God. What kept ringing in my ears as I shook all the time was the first commandment: ‘I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt not place false Gods before me.’”

When the Buddhists prayed to a certain white paper, Zehraa'a said she feared she would lose her mind. “All my life I had related to an unseen God and I couldn't go back on that. I preferred to relate to a God that was unseen,” she said.

She started doing research on Islam and spoke to members of the Nation. “But at that time—1971—some of the people in the Nation of Islam were saying that Black people are God and created the world,” she recalled. She found the Nation's Minister Lonnie Shabazz to be “materialistic, chauvinistic and arrogant.”

She wouldn't give up though, because Islam is a religion that accepts all people unconditionally. This was important since she felt impure. “The Catholic religion places a lot of emphasis on material virginity. It's the whole idea of the Virgin Mary and the nuns being married to God. And I had gotten raped so didn't feel pure enough to become a nun even

though as a little girl I used to wear a towel on my head and my mother's apron as a long skirt. I just knew then that I had a spiritual calling.”

On this leg of her spiritual journey, Zehraa'a's home-life kept getting progressively worse. She just couldn't keep from running away from home. Her parents gave her the option of either going into a psychiatric hospital or into a detention home. She chose a hospital. She had already had bouts with what doctors called nervous breakdown but she calls “an interlude, a time out to deal with the battles going on inside me.”

She saw about a dozen psychiatrists—both as an in-patient and an out-patient. Her health problems ended when she met her husband and became a Muslim.

She has found contentment with Islam for the nearly two years she has been a member of the faith. And she feels pure in the sense that counts. She likes the fact that in Islam, you relate directly with God with no go-betweens. “In Islam you confess to God directly. Because you know that God sees you and is the only one to forgive you, you are harder on yourself.”

She also likes the internalization of ideals that go on in the Islamic faith, the fact that ideals become a way of life with Muslims. Another Muslim had said it better. According to Ibrahim Mahdi, the process of praying five times a day and meditating enables Muslims to examine their actions constantly and weigh them against the law of God as given in the Quran. By praying often, he said, “we stay in constant remembrance of God. After a while we begin to internalize the prayers, their meanings and achieve an upliftment.”

Zehraa'a's husband, Sulaiman, a student at the Howard School of Communications, writes the column for *The Hilltop* on Islam. The story of his conversion is similar to his wife's.

Born in a Christian family where his father lived apart from his mother, Sulaiman was so enthusiastic about religion

that he wanted to become a preacher when he grew up. But he was distracted for a while by the gangs he joined which resulted in his being incarcerated in juvenile homes for criminal activities at the tender age of 10 or 11. “My friends and I were into house-breaking,” he said matter of factly. On one occasion he was incarcerated for beating up a white teacher.

While in detention, he resorted to prayers as a plea for help from God. At the age of 16 or 17, his career in crime had ended but he was considered a “hard core social adjustment” student. He said at 17, he, along with Stokely Carmichael and others, formed the group known as the Zulus. He described it as a “revolutionary cadre, involved in militancy, training and indoctrinated with the political philosophy of nationalism, liberation and revolution.”

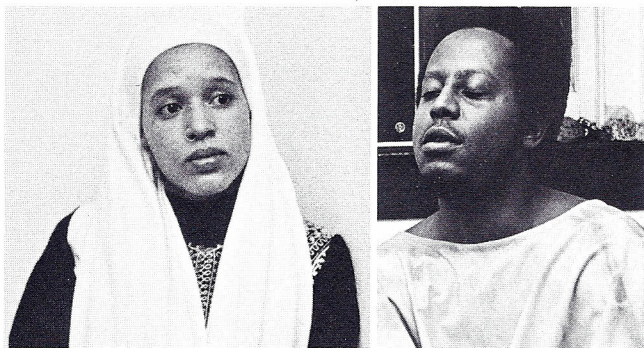
They studied great African civilizations on their own. The special school he went to under the Washington School of Psychiatry paid him money to go to and stay in. He did, and used some of the money he earned to help his mother, especially after his brother died from drug overdose.

He did other things for money. In junior high school, he was a bootlegger. The other students were his customers. “We always stayed drunk,” he recalled soberly.

There was no thought of God then.

While doing a part-time job in the office of the late Senator Robert Kennedy signing the out-going mail with a machine bearing the senator's signature, he became class conscious. Invited as a token Black to the senator's parties, he said he used to sit in one corner and sip a little drink all night while taking in the plush details of the house.

While bouncing about in the ghettos of northwest Washington, Sulaiman met a Black Panther-dialectical materialist called Musa, and Kwesi whom he said used to be Carmichael's bodyguard. Musa believed there was no God and



Zehraa'a UI Mahdi and Sulaiman

Kwesi was moving toward Islam and was very desirous of marrying many wives.

They moved in together and for a while Sulaiman started to think about God, obviously influenced by Kwesi. He read up on Islam and saw similarities between Malcolm X and himself. He was elated. "Malcolm X is the greatest Black man I have ever looked up to," he said.

His face—a face that has definitely not seen many smiles—broke into one as he spoke of another hero of his, Ahmad Evans, who is now in prison in Cleveland for killing a policeman. Sulaiman recalled the trial with pride. The judge asked him if there was anything he would like to say before sentencing and he (disappointed for not killing more), said, "Yes. I am sorry my gun jammed."

At this point, Sulaiman observed quite correctly that he is not a pacifist. "I am more inclined to the principle of war. I was convinced that there is a God and I needed a revolutionary religion." Islam was it.

Why not Christianity? "Christianity is too 'pie in the sky.' I couldn't wait to get to heaven to wear gold slippers when I needed shoes here on earth. Islam deals with both physical and spiritual balance. We believe this world is a prerequisite for the next. So we should have a certain degree of paradise in it. With Christianity you do nothing. God will do it all. With Islam you must do something for yourself."

He has been a Muslim for six years, and not a member of the Nation. He gives his reason for not joining the Nation: "I am looking for the total degree of knowledge that can be attained in Islam instead of a particular degree that can be offered by a particular school of Islam. I don't want to confine myself to any particular school."

Like a true Muslim, Sulaiman obeys the laws of Islam. Though everyone seems to agree that Muslims are not supposed to dance, Sulaiman and his wife beg to be different. Zehraa'a explained

important point: "We are allowed to maintain our culture as long as it is not against the principles of the religion."

Her husband too made a noteworthy statement: "Islam originated from Africa, not Arabia 1400 years ago." And he is backed by scholars like John Henrik Clarke and Yosef ben-Jochannan.

This is how Sulaiman argued his case. Prophet Muhammad was the last Prophet and messenger of God, therefore he technically completed Islam as a religion. He couldn't be the last Prophet *and* the originator of the religion. Rather, "the first Prophet of Islam is considered to be the first man whom many call Adam."

The Bible says that Adam was created at the junction of the White and Blue Nile. Sulaiman called attention to the fact that this is in today's Sudan, south of Egypt. The people inhabiting this area, the Nubians, moved north to today's Egypt and built the pyramids. "That," he said, "is where life started." Some of these Nubians or Blacks moved even further north into Arabia and Europe where, in his words, "we got a snow job."

Thus Sulaiman UI Mahdi has given us serious food for thought. He, like many others, hoped to use Islam as a vehicle for overcoming the "two-ness—an American, a Negro" which DuBois spoke about and to seek the "recourse to the African heritage" which Samuel Allen implied in his statement. Now, if what UI Mahdi said is true, the Muslims have a bigger bonus than they had bargained for. One step further and one can say, God, if he or she must have a color, is probably Black. *Eureka!* It is the stuff of which dreams are made. It is the stuff by which the once wretched of the earth can redeem their battered psyches. Perhaps religion is still the opiate of the people. Perhaps, it has never ceased being that. □