

THE BLACK MUSLIMS: A CONTEMPORARY  
REVITALIZED MOVEMENT

by

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS . . . . .	ii
LIST OF TABLES . . . . .	v
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
A. Social Movements and Social Change . . . . .	1
B. Revitalization Movements . . . . .	3
1. Consequences . . . . .	4
2. Sociological Significance . . . . .	5
C. Black Muslim Movement and Revitalization Theory . . . . .	7
D. Problem Statement . . . . .	13
II. RISE OF SOCIAL TENSIONS FOR BLACK AMERICANS . . . . .	14
A. Loss of Native Culture . . . . .	15
B. Impact of Slavery on the Negro Family Life . . . . .	19
C. Black Economic Crisis of Reconstruction . . . . .	23
D. Stratification in Black Community . . . . .	26
III. RISE OF BLACK RACIAL MOVEMENTS . . . . .	31
A. General Black Discontentment and Rise of Black Nationalism . . . . .	31
B. Rise of the Black Muslim Movement . . . . .	39
1. Its Founder . . . . .	39
2. Black Muslim Ideology and Organization . . . . .	40
3. Growth . . . . .	42
4. Membership . . . . .	42

CHAPTER	PAGE
IV. IMPACT OF BLACK MUSLIM IDEOLOGY ON LOWER-CLASS BLACKS . . . . .	44
A. Major Problems of Lower-Class, Urban Blacks . . . . .	44
B. Consequences of Black Muslim Ideology . . . . .	46
C. The Value of Revitalization Theory for the Analysis of Social Movements . . . . .	52
D. Future Trends for the Black Muslim Movement . . . . .	53
APPENDIX . . . . .	55
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	60



## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
1. Black Muslim and Negro Christian Relationships	
Comparative Study Results . . . . .	50

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Social Movements and Social Change

Fluid social conditions are conducive to collective behavior.

Violence sometimes occurs, when rising aspirations are not met by reforming. When events or forces disturb, limit, oppose, sever, destroy or disrupt on-going processes of social disorganization, conflicts or changes are likely to occur.<sup>1</sup> New perspectives and aspirations often generate collective action and institute new ways of life. Tensions and disruptions caused by both external and internal stresses and strains acting on an organization may be resolved or suppressed, or tensions and disruptions may grow into conflicts which eventually call for extensive changes. All organizations are subjected to diverse kinds of strains. For this reason, social theorists often speak of social conflict and social change as immanent and universal within social organization.<sup>2</sup>

Given ever-present stresses and strains acting upon social organizations, tension and disruptions are produced.

It appears appropriate to construct a theoretical explanation of the process through which these stresses and strains lead to open conflict and to relatively permanent organizational change.

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<sup>1</sup>Wilbert E. Moore, A Reconsideration of Theories of Social Change, American Sociological Review, Vol. 25, Dec. 1960, pp. 810-818.

<sup>2</sup>Pitrim A. Sorokin, Sociological and Cultural Dynamics (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1957), Chapter 38.

From a broader point of view, we can identify two schools of theoretical thought in contemporary sociology concerning social conflict and change. These are the "adjustive" and the "power" perspectives on conflict and change.<sup>3</sup> The adjustive maneuvers to initiate compensatory action concerning the disruptions which threaten the 'key features' in a social organization. The power perspective takes a radically different course. It suggests that when compensatory action fails, partially autonomous subunits of an organization should exercise power and act in their own behalf and interest, independent of the larger organization.

At times, therefore, the component subunits will tend to act as self-oriented elements. They will temporarily seek to deal with their own internal problems in order to achieve individual goals, rather than contribute to the functioning of the encompassing organization. Thus, independent goalseeking actions of subunits that the power perspective takes as given phenomena frequently are these units' attempts to protect their own 'key features' through adjustive measures. When such unified, lasting, collective action has the following features it is called a social movement, (1) a distinct perspective and ideology, (2) a strong sense of solidarity and idealism, and (3) an orientation toward action.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>James C. Davies, Toward A Theory of Revolution, ASR, Vol. 27, February 1962, pp. 5-19.

<sup>4</sup>Herbert Blumer, Social Movements in A.M. Lee (ed.) New Outlines of the Principles of Society (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1951), pp. 210-211.

### Revitalization Movements

Several instances of attempted and sometimes successful innovation of whole cultural systems have been examined by behavioral scientists. These innovations have been commonly labeled and characterized as "Nativistic, Reform, Messianic, Charismatic, Mass, and Social-type movements." In addition, "Cargo cults, Utopian community, Sect formulation, and Revolution," also are innovational instances. All these phenomena of major cultural innovation progress through a uniform process called "revitalization."<sup>5</sup> The definition by Wallace of a revitalization movement as "a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture," implies an organismic analogy. Included, are the corollary principles of stress and homeostasis, and society, seen as an organic system is constantly exposed to stress induced in its component subsystems. Thus, society, maintains its integrity by means of coordinated actions or stress-reducing mechanisms sufficient to handle both external and internal stress.

For a person involved in the process of revitalization, Wallace finds it necessary for each member to be equipped with a "mazeway," i.e., a mental image of self, society, nature, and culture through which values operate in maintaining social order to minimize stress. Wallace notes: "whenever an individual who is under chronic stress receives repeated information which indicates that his "mazeway" does not lead to action which should reduce the

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<sup>5</sup>Anthony C. Wallace, Revitalization Movements, American Anthropologist, Vol. 58, 1956, p. 264.

level of stress, he must choose between maintaining his present mazeway and tolerating the stress, or changing the mazeway in an attempt to reduce the stress."<sup>6</sup> Sometimes it may become necessary to make changes in the "real" system in order to bring "mazeway" and "reality" into congruence. The effort to work a change in the mazeway and real system together so as to permit more effective stress reduction, is the effort of revitalization; and the collaboration of the number of persons in such an effort, is called a revitalization movement.<sup>7</sup>

### Consequences

Revitalization movements are not an unusual phenomena. In fact, it can be argued that all organized religions are relics of old revitalization movements surviving in routinized form in stabilized cultures, and that religious phenomena per se originated in the revitalization process, i.e., in visions of a new way of life by individuals under extreme stress.<sup>8</sup>

The most prominent historical cases documented by Wallace's findings include the origins of Christianity and Islam in Asia, and the Ghost Dance and Peyote cult of the American Indian tribes in America.

All revitalization movements in cases where the full course is run, move through five ideal-typical stages:<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 267.

<sup>7</sup>James H. Laue, A Contemporary Revitalization Movement in American Race Relations, Social Forces, No. 42, 1964, p. 316.

<sup>8</sup>Wallace, op. cit., p. 268.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 268-275.

1. Steady State - chronic stress within the system varies within tolerable limits because culturally recognized techniques for the satisfying needs operate efficiently.
2. Period of Increased Individual Stress - Individual members of a population experience increasingly severe stress as a result of the decreasing efficiency of certain stress reduction techniques over a period of time.
3. Period of Cultural Distortion - Individual maladjustments combine to produce internal cultural distortion because the "elements" are not harmoniously related but are mutually incongruent and interfering. Stress reproduces itself and anxiety rises as the incongruities of the "mazeway" are conceived, i.e., disillusionment with, apathy toward problems of adaptation, and a meaningless life arise.
4. The Period of Revitalization - [Disaster to total cultures or subsystems of a society may be forestalled through the revitalization process.] This theory specifies six major tasks which a revitalization movement must perform at this stage: mazeway reformulation, communication, organization, adaptation, culture transformation, and routinization.
5. New Steady State - Once cultural transformation has taken place, a new organization or Gestalt is in operation for members of the revitalized group and the host and/or neighboring cultures.

### Sociological Significance

A movement is usually made up of a variety of forms and groupings. Such diversity of organizations, ideologies, and strategies, is exemplified specifically by the civil rights movements where each organization tends to adopt a distinctive mission and role, and a distinctive appeal to its constituency. For example, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) concentrates on legal rights; the National Urban League, for enlarging job opportunities and negotiating with business associations; the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) - all have organized direct-action such as freedom rides,

sit-ins, voting rights, and protest marches. The Black Muslims, to be considered later, however, have fostered self-improvement, Negro isolation, and rejection of white society.

Negro actions opposing slavery in the past to present day massive attacks on racial discrimination manifest a long history of racial protest organizations and movements in the United States. Protest movements have become a symptom of pervasive social conflict distorting the normal social relations between discrete groups of people. Recently, direct-action protest has become an important means of communicating the Negro's extreme dissatisfaction with his condition of existence in America.<sup>10</sup>

A large population of Negroes have grown increasingly restive under practices of racial discrimination and prejudice. Their frustrations increase as they see some people assume political and social roles which they as citizens of an advanced Christian culture have yet to attain. There is developing, therefore, a radical element within the Negro subgroup which covets the leadership of these leaderless masses who have yet to commit themselves to traditional forms of Negro protest. Many black man and women have not participated in sit-ins, have not marched, and not belonged to protest organizations. They have simply lost faith in the ability of Negro leadership to rescue them from their misery. They do not believe that agencies directed by the white man at any level are truly concerned with bringing them to a place of equality in this society.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Benjamin Muse, The American Negro Revolution: From Nonviolence to Black Power (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1969), pp. 24-25.

<sup>11</sup>Eric C. Lincoln, My Face is Black (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).

One may well expect from symptoms of their present conditions to see concerted efforts for change by blacks to make congruent their "mazeway" and "real" system. Indeed, one could visualize that a kind of chauvinistic anxiety move to a new position would permit more effective stress reduction.

Black nationalism historically through protest organizations and movements indicated the Negro's struggle for freedom, and also, that his so-called "mazeway" did not lead to action which reduced the level of stress for him. According to the revitalization theory, two alternatives are open to the individual under stressful circumstances: he can either maintain his present mazeway and tolerate the stress, or make a change in the mazeway in order to reduce the stress.

#### The Black Muslim Movement and Revitalization Theory

The Black Muslim movement is one of the several alternative avenues of expression for many angry, sensitive, and disillusioned Black Americans today. Although substantially Americanized at the value level, the Black American is frustrated at the personality level because he lacks institutionalized channels of cultural and economic achievement. In the past, the dominant culture provided a closed system for blacks where self-hate and neuroticism were used as adjustive techniques. Today, more aggressive, safely available channels of protest include: enhanced endeavor, discrimination against out-groups, and militancy.<sup>12</sup> The mechanisms

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<sup>12</sup>Gordon W. Allport, The Nature of Prejudice, (Garden City; New York: Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1958), Chapter 19.



available in the Black Muslim movement include these plus the substitution of identity as a "Muslim" and not as a "Negro."

The Black Muslim movement also exhibits several of the phases of the revitalization movements which Wallace has suggested:

1. The Nativistic phase of the Muslim movement eliminates the white slave master and his so-called 'evil' system. It replaces it by an all-black nation within a nation in which contact with the white's alien customs and values is undesirable.
2. After the Revivalistic fashion, the Black Muslims strive to institute patterns of ancient Islamic culture.
3. The Millenarian emphasis of the movement, too is strong because the messenger, Elijah Muhammad and his disciples state time and again, that Allah (God) will engineer a demise of the white man if the white man does not repent in time.
4. The Messianic character of the movement is evidenced by the belief of the Black Muslims that Elijah Muhammad is a messianic figure - in flesh.

Wallace suggests five ideal-typical stages of development through which revitalization movements usually move. For viewing the sociological significance, and to establish the authenticity of Black Muslims as a revitalized movement, we may now view the points of congruence and/or variation between Wallace's so-called "processual structure,"<sup>13</sup> and the historical development of the Black Muslim movement in question.

Some of the dynamic patterns which have bred and nurtured the Black Muslim movement may be summarized as follows:

1. The dissatisfaction of Negroes with their disproportionate share of the benefits from the expanding American economy.
2. The failure of the existing political, occupational, and religious systems to provide meaningful rationalization for the inability of blacks to attain democratic goals.

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<sup>13</sup>Wallace, op. cit., pp. 268-269.

3. The emergence of African independent nations - undoubtedly the most specific model for black militancy today. Black Muslim leaders press for identification with the African spirit of revolt. African independence parallels seeking independence from the white man in America.

The Black Muslim movement is also symptomatic of the anxiety and unrest which characterizes the contemporary black world situation today. They realize however, that the bulk of Black Americans, especially the upper and middle class, are thoroughly middle class in their values and are inhibited from pursuing a 'Back-to-Africa' type of Garveyism.<sup>14</sup>

Wallace's terminology of 'steady state' does not seem appropriate in the present case. Societies are hardly ever in a state which can be properly described as steady. The history of the black-white conflict in America suggests that all Negroes did not maintain a stable relationship to whites in the sense that Wallace's theory implies. Thus, social changes in the movement are better identified as 'stage one' and 'stage two' with the intervening processes seen as mediating developments leading to a new stage of systemic equilibrium. Stage one was characterized by nationalistic movements through the 1920's, and stage two is arbitrarily designated at commencing in the mid-1950's. The Black Muslim movement is an intermediary movement between these two stages.

## II. Period of Increased Individual Stress

The period of "breakdown of the stress reducing mechanisms," for the Negro American has been occurring since the day the first slave arrived. If this was not so, protests of varying intensity throughout the last three

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<sup>14</sup>Laue, op. cit., p. 320.

hundred years would not have taken place.<sup>15</sup> Stress reducing devices have not been provided by the American society either. In order to avoid further status, social, and economic deprivation, the Black Muslims have sought voluntary separatism from whites and middle class blacks as the adjustive technique for changing their mazeway and reducing the stress. By working in prisons and on the streets of Harlem and other large cities, Black Muslims have apparently succeeded in convincing converts of their deprivation, and have presented converts new, ready-made, life-consuming identity wrapped in the black supremacy concept.<sup>16</sup>

### III. Period of Cultural Distortion

Prolonged stress produced by failure of need satisfaction of the Negro made many to turn to regressive actions of crime, alcoholism, drug addiction, prostitution, and family disorganization. Such deviance produced distortion of the Negro subculture. The Black Muslims have capitalized on this cultural distortion by winning many of their converts from this lowest plane of society.

### IV. Period of Revitalization

The first task in revitalization is the mazeway reformulation. Reformulation usually depends on restructuring of elements and subsystems already current in a system. The Black Muslim claim to preach a doctrine entirely alien to American culture, but actually, their position entails

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<sup>15</sup>Louis Lomax, The Negro Revolt (New York: Harpers', 1962).

<sup>16</sup>Laue, op. cit., p. 321.

accepting and reshaping middle class ideals and values.<sup>17</sup> They also believe they are the 'elect' of Allah (God). Pursuit of wealth is only good in so far as it enhances the good of the movement and elevates it also. Therefore, converts to Islam, the Black Muslims claim, will naturally come under supernatural care and protection received through divine guidance of their leader, Elijah Muhammad.

More important than the reformulation of the mazeway, is the adaptation and application of it to every day life. The communication of the insights of the messenger to his disciples and converts is such adapting and applying. Black Muslims rationalize advantages of this process by believing that the convert will come under care and protection of certain supernatural being, and that both he and his society will benefit materially from identification with some definable new cultural system - the Black Muslim interpretation of Islam.

The organizational phase of the revitalization stage depends on the legitimate transfer of charismatic qualities to other individuals in the organization. Although Elijah Muhammad is regarded as the unquestionable authority - sanctioned by the supernatural - the leadership structure has sufficiently developed to ensure its maintenance after his death. The disciplinary strength of the Fruit of Islam, (FOI) the unifying force for all Black Muslims, makes other Negro rights organizations and other lower-class religious groups envious.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>E. U. Esssein-Udom, Black Nationalism: A Search for An Identity (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1962), Chapter 12.

<sup>18</sup>Laue, op. cit., pp. 321-322.

The adaptation phase of the revitalization process occupies an important area of the theory. Wallace suggests three aspects of this process: doctrinal modification, political and diplomatic maneuvers, and force. Some modifications are manifest in the Black Muslim drive in that, (1) softening black supremacy is to attract others besides lower class blacks, (2) the target of black resentment is colonialism and not always the white man, (3) relationships with other Negro rights groups have improved because Black Muslim leaders no longer isolate themselves from NAACP chapters and Christian congregations, (4) they no longer so strongly condemn Christianity. Muhammad often seeks cooperation of Christians in areas of mutual interest.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the hostility of the Muslims stems more from what Christianity has not done for the Negro in the past rather than what it has done. (5) with regard to force as an adaptive technique, Wallace suggests that as organized hostility develops, emphasis shifts from the cultivating ideal to combating the unbeliever. Since the early 1960's, the environment has been perceived as less hostile hence the emphasis has swung to internal concerns of solidarity and uplift.<sup>20</sup> The Black Muslim movement today appears to be in the 'adaptive' stage of revitalization. How long it will remain there will perhaps depend on the acceptance of the movement as a legitimate means of social adjustment by a considerable proportion of the population. Also, if the Muslims continue to adapt their mazeway to solve new stressful problems of blacks who are most disillusioned.

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<sup>19</sup>Eric C. Lincoln, The Black Muslims in America (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 200.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 159.

For Wallace, routinization occurs after the desired transformation has taken place. During Elijah Muhammad's lifetime such transformation has taken place. Perhaps the real challenge will come after his death as to who will be his legitimate successor.

#### V. New Steady State

Wallace's theory of five ideal-typical stages requires that the revitalization movement progresses through each stage. This analysis and terminology is derived from documentary data of several hundred "dead" movements among western and nonwestern peoples on five continents gathered in a survey of anthropological literature.<sup>21</sup> This approach limits this analysis. One must characterize the Black Muslim movement as an "in-process" movement, and interpret its sociological significance in that context.

#### Problem Statement

The main purpose of this report is to view the Black Muslim movement as an in-process revitalization movement in America, whose members are making "a deliberate, organized, and conscious effort to construct a more satisfying culture," for themselves, and to ascertain the impact of such collective endeavor on a segment of the black community that professes to be active members of this movement.

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<sup>21</sup>Wallace, op. cit., p. 264.

## CHAPTER II

### RISE OF SOCIAL TENSION FOR BLACK AMERICANS

American Negroes have lived in the United States for three hundred and fifty years under conditions ranging between slavery and freedom, with instances of conflict, revolt and accommodation which present fascinating and challenging social situations. The forced transplantation of African Negroes as slaves to America,<sup>22</sup> their transition from slavery to freedom,<sup>23</sup> and later a continuous mass migration from the plantation to the metropolis,<sup>24</sup> bear witness to the social metamorphosis of this group of people. Many died as a result of their struggle for a better life.

"... that the Negro American has survived at all is extraordinary - a lesser people might have died out, as indeed others have. That the Negro community has not only survived but has entered national affairs as a moderate, humane, and constructive national force, is the highest testament to the healing powers of the "democratic ideal," and the creative vitality of the Negro people."<sup>25</sup>

In their study of major ethnic groups, Glazer and Moynihan estimated the Negro as being "... only an American, and nothing else. He has no values and culture to guard and to protect."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma (New York: Harper and Row, 1944), p. 123.

<sup>23</sup>E. Franklin Frazier, The Negro Family in the United States (New York: Mcmillian, 1949), rev. ed., 1966. Introduction and Chapter 1.

<sup>24</sup>Myrdal, op. cit., Part III, Chapter 8.

<sup>25</sup>Moynihan, op. cit., p. 75.

<sup>26</sup>N. Glazer and P. D. Moynihan, Beyond the Melting Pot (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press and the Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 51.

The transportation of slaves from Africa completely disrupted the life of the Africans and contributed mightily to their "Americanization." The discontinuity between Africa and America had a particular impact on Negro family life as well.

Among the earliest settlers in this country, American Negro history can be subdivided into three distinct periods. The period of slavery (1619-1863); the period of biracial accommodation (1863-1941); and the period of integration or of voluntary separatism (1941 to present).<sup>27</sup> Three facts also stand out. The first that the Negro came to this country from Africa and not from Europe. The second that they came in chains and consequently were uprooted from their culture and family moorings. The third that they have been subjected to systematic exclusion from social and economic participation and influence in the major institutions of the society.<sup>28</sup>

#### Loss of Native Culture

The Africans who were taken captive and brought to North America represented several cultures and language backgrounds. Some carried knowledge of the complex cultures representing highly advanced civilizations.<sup>29</sup> They were thrown into a totally rootless situation, were not allowed to

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<sup>27</sup>S. K. Weinberg, Race Relations: Conflict and Change (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1970), Chapter 5.

<sup>28</sup>Andrew Billingsley, Black Families in White America (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), pp. 37-49.

<sup>29</sup>L. Bennett, Jr., Just Before the Mayflower (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1966). Also see M. Herskovitz, The Myth of the Negro Past (New York: Harper and Row, 1941).



retain their names, their family structure, and derivatively their identities were destroyed. Several scholars agree that systematic attempts were made to strip the Africans of their culture. Frazier summarizes the impact of slavery on the slaves as follows:

"The African family system was destroyed, and the slave was separated from his kinsmen and friends. Moreover, in the United States there was little chance that he could reknit the ties of friendship and old associations. If by chance he encountered fellow slaves with whom he could communicate in his native tongue, he was separated from them. From the very beginning he was forced to learn English in order to obey the commands of his white master. Whatever memories he might have retained of his native land and native customs became meaningless in the New World."<sup>30</sup>

That the old world culture failed to survive for Black Americans should not be surprising.

Such cultural destruction and denying initiative-taking to Negroes molded the personality and behavior of Negroes disadvantageously. In bondage, they acquired a completely dependent position. A bearable life for the slave depended not on initiative or drive, but on blind obedience and being uncomplainingly subservient to the master, who, in turn, pursued the very goals which he denied his Negro slave. Slaves were "property" to be sold, traded, or given as gifts by slave owners. To the slave trader who only had an economic interest, the slave was a mere "utility."<sup>31</sup>

In moving from Africa to the New World, Negroes were confronted with an alien culture of European genesis with different norms, values, and ways of life. Therefore, whatever the nature of the two cultural systems, that

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<sup>30</sup>E. F. Frazier, Black Bourgeoisie (Glencoe: Free Press, 1957), p. 1.

<sup>31</sup>E. F. Frazier, The Negro Family in the United States, p. 360.

one from which they came and the one to which they were brought, they were never free to engage in the usual process of acculturation. Not only were they cut off from their previous culture, but they were not permitted to develop or assimilate to the new culture similarly to other immigrant groups.<sup>32</sup>

Unlike other immigrants too, most Negroes were denied the use of their own system of social or family organization. Negro Americans were unable to build a community on ethnic unity to sustain individual Negroes. In fact, social and economic competition between each wave of immigrants and migrating Negroes in the 20th century has been continual but with odds stacked heavily against the Negro. Insignificant social and family ties, lack of political strength, and discriminatory practices and repression from practically from all whites, prevented Negroes from developing any consistent and significant achievement or assimilation since the Civil War.

While Negroes have been here longer than most immigrant groups, they did not start arriving in the northern, urban cities in large numbers until this century. The Negro is the 'latest immigrant.' But despite the growing concentration of Negroes in northern cities, this 'latest immigrant' has not had the same political opportunities to achieve economic ends as quickly as other European immigrants who went to work in an expanding blue-collar economy. Actually, the Negro has come to the city in a time of automation - unskilled jobs were disappearing - and when educational requirements for skilled labor were high.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Billingsley, op. cit., p. 49.

<sup>33</sup>M. Harrington, The Other America (New York: Mcmillian, 1962), p. 37.

It could be assumed that the Negro would have assimilated and integrated Anglo-American culture, perhaps better than his counter-part the European immigrant who arrived on the scene much later. However, such an assumption is incorrect because racial segregation and discrimination of Negroes prevented their being assimilated. Gunnar Myrdal and his associates sum these odds for us appropriately:

" ... while it is true that considerable efforts are directed toward 'Americanization' of all groups of alien origin, in the case of the colored peoples, the American policy is in reverse. They are excluded from assimilation."<sup>34</sup>

Unlike Orientals, the Negro did not have an accepted culture or an organized nation to fall back upon outside of America. With the memory of slavery -- a grim, dehumanizing circumstance -- they were exploited as a subordinate caste. In fact, the 'anti-amalgamation doctrine' is still rationalized in several states by the white majority group to prevent miscegenation, and hence to preserve the purity of the white race.<sup>35</sup>

The very circumstances which led to their departure from their homeland, the Middle Passage between Africa and the New World, and the institution of slavery which developed on their arrival in what is now known as the United States are unique only to Black Americans out of all United States minority groups. The institution of slavery, with all its peculiarities, left a legacy which continues to play a dominant role in the life of all Americans. After nearly three and a half centuries, white Americans continue to react to Negroes with a mass irrationality which precludes the complete entrance of blacks into the larger society. Yet it

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<sup>34</sup>Myrdal, op. cit., pp. 624-626.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 586-592.

would be difficult to imagine members of a group putting forth more diligent and persistent efforts for acceptance than those put forth by blacks in America.<sup>36</sup>

### Impact of Slavery on Negro Family Life

American Negroes have a history which contributes to describing their present status. The forebears of the Negro were heavily influenced by geographic, historical, and cultural conditions of West Africa. Some West Africans had highly complex civilizations, patterns of family life were closely knit, well organized with kin and community. While there is considerable dispute among scholars about the relative influence of the West African heritage on Negro family life today, there is no doubt that slavery had an impact on both the form and substance of the slave family.

Economic demands for cheap labor fostered permanent slavery in the United States. In fact, only fifty years after their arrival in the United States the slave status of the Negro became fixed by law in some states. Quickly the slave was converted from the free, independent human being he had been in Africa, to mere "property."<sup>37</sup> And, while the process of Negro 'dehumanization' provided superior opportunities, privileges, and status for the white majority, it made the Negroes progressively more disengaged from their native cultures, their families, and their humanity.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>A. Pinkney, Black Americans (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), Chapter 1.

<sup>37</sup>Frazier, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>38</sup>Bennett, op. cit., Chapter 4.

While slavery everywhere was cruel and inhuman, there were important variations and degrees of cruelty, with differing consequences on the family life of the slave. All the same major historians who have observed and treated slavery in the New World, agree it was a vastly different and much more oppressive institution in the United States than in Latin America, for example. They also insist that a knowledge of the past is essential for understanding the present. Their axiom seems especially relevant as far as Black Americans are concerned, for theirs is a 'unique' history - unparalleled when compared to those of other minority groups in the United States.<sup>39</sup>

Above all other causes perhaps, the uniqueness of the structure of present day Negro family in the United States is said to be the product of slavery in which there was direct intervention by the slaveholder in regulating the family life of the slave. Strong marital bonds were discouraged and male hands were reduced to utter dependency, and to the status of 'chattel.' The slave received none of the protections of organized society because he was not considered to be a person. The slaveholder maintained absolute power over his "property" for he was endowed by law with rights over the slave, and in return he was expected to assume certain obligations toward the slave. The law required that masters be humane to their slaves, furnish them adequate food and clothing, and provide care for them during sickness and old age.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, slaves were at one and the same time

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<sup>39</sup>S. Elkins, Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 81.

<sup>40</sup>K. M. Stampp, The Peculiar Institution (New York: Knopf, 1956), p. 192.

human beings and "property." Throughout the antebellum South, the cold language and statutes and judicial decisions made it evident that legally the slave was less a person than a thing.<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps the most important element in defining the slave's status was the perpetual nature of slavery. Slaves were destined to occupy this status throughout their lives and to transmit it to their children, who in turn transmitted their inherited status to their children. Hence slavery and Negro became synonymous, and since slaves were defined as innately inferior, Negroes too, were defined as inferior beings.<sup>42</sup> Also, slaves were forbidden by law to enter into contractual arrangements. Their marriages were not legally binding relationships. Husbands, wives, and children could be separated at the direction of the slaveholder as was frequently the case. Thus, it was impossible to maintain a stable family system.

The slave family had little importance as regards the traditional functions which marriage was expected to perform for those who entered into the relationship. Parents had little to do or say about rearing children or controlling other forces leading to cohesion in family life.

The nature of the institution of slavery was such that no family in the usual sense can be said to have existed, because children derived their condition from the status of the mother. The father was not the head of the family, the holder of property, the provider, or protector.<sup>43</sup> His wife

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>42</sup>Pinkney, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>43</sup>Stamp, op. cit., p. 343.

could be abused, and whipped or violated by the slaveholder or overseer in his and his children's presence.<sup>44</sup> In short, the slaveholder dominated the structure of the slave family which was removed from the protection of any external organization, nor was the family recognized by any religious or secular agency. Whatever recognition the slave received was voluntary on the part of the master.

Despite laws against it, miscegenation was extensive, especially between white men and slave women. Slave women had no rights and few means to protect themselves against the sexual desires of white men. Concubinage and polygamy were so widespread in some cities in the South, that they almost gained social acceptance. Rape of slave women was not a crime but merely a trespass on the property of their master. Children of such relationships were slaves and were treated accordingly. In a few instances, their white fathers emancipated them and provided for them. The extent of such miscegenous relationships is evidenced by the mulatto slave population which in 1860 was estimated to be 410,000 out of a total slave population of approximately 4,000,000.<sup>45</sup>

The process of dehumanization started at the beginning of the slave-gathering-process, was intensified with each stage along the way.

In the United States, contrary to Latin America, the legal system made no provision for and took no special recognition of marriage and family life among slaves. The wife of a slave could not be protected by her husband. This powerlessness of the Negro male to protect his wife or

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<sup>44</sup>Pinkney, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>45</sup>Kenneth G. Goode, From Africa to the United States And Then... (Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1969), Chapter 13.

family for two and a half centuries under slavery has crippled relations of Negro men and women to this day.

The particular factors which seem to characterize the impact of slavery on the Negro and his family in the United States, in addition to the above are, the absence of legal foundation, sanction and protection of marriage as an institution among slaves; the exploitation of slave women by white owners and overseers for both pleasure and profit; the systematic denial of a role for a man as husband and father; and the willful separation of related men, women, and children.<sup>46</sup> In short, one observes that there was an absence, in the United States, of societal support and protection for the Negro family as a physical, psychological, social, or economic unit. This crippled the development not only of the individual slaves but of families, and therefore of the Negro people.<sup>47</sup>

#### Black Economic Crisis of Reconstruction

Even after slavery was abolished, new obstacles emerged. The Civil War disrupted the economy of the Southern States, and the Negro found himself amidst a surplus of every kind of manpower with little opportunity to strengthen his new freedom with economic gains.

On the economic level, the emancipated blacks often lacked skills, tools, and land, to earn a living. Many became tenant farmers for the

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<sup>46</sup>W. M. Phillips, Jr., The Boycott: A Negro Community in Conflict, Phylon 22:24-30, Spring, 1961 and The Documentary History of American Industrial Society: Plantation and Frontier, 1963, Chapter 2, p. 45.

<sup>47</sup>Billingsley, op. cit., Chapter 2, p. 69.



white landowners who provided tools but demanded high rentals. The rearranged social structure merely transformed the blacks into land-bound peons indebted to white land owners. In this bondage, the black person was deprived economically as well as segregated in public and personal services; he drew none of the rewards and prerogatives that came from hard work. Slowly they began their trek northward until their migration became an exodus.

During World War I, blacks continued to move northward. Their numbers only declined during the 1930's because of the extended economic depression. Continued and increasing arrival of immigrants from Europe during an expanding period of blue-collar economy in the latter part of the nineteenth century, also made it difficult for blacks to gain an earlier economic footing in the North and in the West.<sup>48</sup>

Expanding industry denied immediate opportunity for black employment. Skilled and unskilled European immigrant labor was preferred to the unskilled or semiskilled Negro.<sup>49</sup> Upwardly mobile Negroes could not disappear so easily into the middle classes of the larger society as did European and other ethnic groups.

It was until World War II, when the decline of immigrants from Europe coincided with the demand for manpower by the expanding war industries and the armed forces, that Negro migrants from the South made considerable advance in industrial employment. The Great Migration was a welcome

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<sup>48</sup>Charles F. Marden and Gladys Meyer, Minorities in American Society, 2nd Ed. (New York: American Book Company, 1962). And Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, op. cit., pp. 146-150.

<sup>49</sup>Myrdal, op. cit., Part I, Chapters 3 and 5.

consequence for the former slave who was now tolerated because America as a nation, after the war, had to stand before the whole world in favor of racial tolerance and cooperation, and of racial equality, denounce racism, and proclaim universal brotherhood and the inalienated human freedom.<sup>50</sup>

The wartime industrial boom was soon followed by the depression of the late twenties and the thirties. It brought a crisis and change in the economic status of the Negro, for the unskilled Negro was always outnumbered by the more skilled, unemployed white worker. Often Negroes had no alternative but to accept employment in low status, menial services - and that only at starvation wage level.<sup>51</sup>

Although the early thirties were bad for all white and non-white, they were more so for the Negro. Consistently outnumbered by better skilled white workers, the majority of unskilled Negroes became confined to the lowest strata of society. The menial and irregular nature of their jobs helped to perpetuate their low economic status resulting from under or un-employment.

The great spurt northward was renewed during and after World War II, at the rate of one and one-half million per decade in the 1940's and 1950's. By 1957 over four million blacks resided in the North, about 98 per cent of them in the cities. Some blacks became skilled blue-collar and white-collar workers; others became educated, conscious of their rights, and determined to press for advantages in the South as well as the North.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 1004. Also Ginzberg, op. cit., pp. 4-5.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp. 754-755.

<sup>52</sup> Marden and Meyer, op. cit., pp. 224-242.

Observations prove that mobilization in the forties set off, perhaps, the most consistent and spectacular period of opportunity for Negroes. Political and economic expansion in the North, increase in the availability for non-farm jobs, an increase in the wages for unskilled and semi-skilled labor offered the rural Negro reentry in civilian economy. Possibly this was due to the fact that during the two decades between the two world wars, the general level of education of American Negroes had increased and improved considerably.<sup>53</sup>

#### Stratification in Black Community

The black community, like the white community which surrounds it, has always maintained a degree of social stratification. During slavery the primary distinction among the Negro slaves were based on those who worked as house servants - mulattoes who were the favored class, and the field hands - the illiterate blacks who were considered 'less than human beings.'

Among the "free" blacks during slavery, several types of distinctions were discernable: mulattoes and blacks; skilled workers and artisans; and domestic workers and unskilled laborers. Finally, many of the "free" Negroes were direct descendents of wealthy white plantation owners. They frequently maintained extensive property holdings and slaves.<sup>54</sup> They associated white ancestry with greater education and mechanical skill.

After emancipation, class distinctions among Negroes frequently followed the patterns established during slavery based on wealth, occupation,

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<sup>53</sup>Myrdal, op. cit., p. 415.

<sup>54</sup>Frazier, op. cit., pp. 275-276.

responsibility, and skin color. Negroes who had been freed before the Civil War distinguished themselves from those who were freed with the emancipation.<sup>55</sup>

Several studies have focused attention on status distinctions in the black community. In judging one another, black people use many of the conventional social-class criteria used by white Americans, such as income, occupation, education, wealth, family background, style of life, refinement, property ownership, organizational affiliations, and respectability and morality.<sup>56</sup>

Recent historical research, however, demonstrated that the place of Negroes in America has been largely determined and defined by the dominant whites.<sup>57</sup> But today, white Americans find themselves facing another breed of the emerging American Negro -- the militant black, who, born in the midst of World War II, raised in its aftermath, is now maturing in this, the second half of the twentieth century. In some ways this war has served to shake that World War II generation of American Negroes out of its 'traditional lethargy.' Their wartime experiences injected a new self-concept which served as a basis for independent individual and collective action. A new leadership has appeared which is no longer accommodating and beholden for its status to the dominant white majority, and no longer ill-trained and

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., pp. 276-278.

<sup>56</sup>A. Davis and John Dollard, Children of Bondage, Washington, D.C., The American Council on Education, 1940, pp. 38-39.

<sup>57</sup>See Phylon, Winter, 1963, pp. 360-368.

confined to a traditional "protest within the status quo."<sup>58</sup>

Since the vast majority of blacks are urban dwellers, and greater complexity of urban life is conducive to greater social disorganization, it might be expected that somewhat more elaborate stratification may be discerned among blacks in urban areas. Most of the studies of social stratification among Negroes delineate a small upper class, a proportionately small but growing middle class, and a large lower class that encompasses the vast majority of Negroes. It is with this last, lower class that we are concerned.

Many stereotyped behaviors that have been developed refer to lower-class Negro conduct: the perpetually unemployed, the lowest paid back-breaking domestic service job-holder, and the disproportionately high welfare aid recipient. This lower-class Negro is most often the recent migrant from the rural South, seeking to improve his status in the city.

Among lower-class Negroes, disorganized family life is prevalent.<sup>59</sup> It is also to lower-class blacks that widespread social pathologies are attributed.<sup>60</sup> These are the individuals who have received fewer social rewards than any other group. Crowded in slums, and treated as 'social outcasts' by other black and white upper and middle classes, they are noticed only when acts of violence are attributed to them.

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<sup>58</sup>H. W. Pfautz, The Power Structure of the Negro Sub-Community: A Case of Study and Comparative View, Phylon 22 (Second Quarter, 1962), pp. 156-166.

<sup>59</sup>Moynihan, op. cit., p. 53-59. Also see U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Policy Planning and Research.

<sup>60</sup>Kenneth B. Clark, The Dark Ghetto (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1965), Chapter 5. Also see Frazier, op. cit., pp. 286-287; 303-304.

In describing the complexity of the lower-class in the black community, Drake and Cayton wrote:

"In addition to those with middle-class aspirations and the stable "church folk", one finds the denizens of the underworld - the pimps and prostitutes, the thieves and pickpockets, the dope addicts and the reefer smokers, the professional gamblers, cutthroats and murderers."<sup>61</sup>

Not all lower-class blacks are employed as Drake and Cayton describe them above. Just one segment of the lower-class are "denizens" of the underworld. However, the life and times of lower-class blacks are difficult, demeaning, and dependent.

How, then, do these denizens of the underworld - the lower-class blacks, the "handicapped third of the Negro population - the people who are badly fed, badly housed, and badly trained for any work" stand? And, what are their prospects for the future?

History points to two conclusions: that animosity, indifference and neglect have characterized the attitudes of the white population toward the Negro in general, in both the North and the South; and that most of the Negro's progress to date, has been made through the economic self-interest of the white community rather than through its active encouragement.<sup>62</sup>

Power in a democracy rests with the majority. Against the backdrop of white animosity or lack of interest, an answer is to find potential allies for blacks among other blacks, and among the poor, the ill-fed, the

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<sup>61</sup> St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, Black Metropolis (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1945), p. 600.

<sup>62</sup> E. Ginzberg, The Negro's Problem is the White's. Article in The New York Times Magazine, February 9, 1964. Chapter 2.

ill-educated, the unemployed of other groups as well. Failing this, a balance must be found. If a minority's program is to gain support of others, it must somehow serve their own needs as well as those of others.

### CHAPTER III

#### RISE OF BLACK RACIAL MOVEMENTS

##### General Black Discontentment and Rise of Black Nationalism

Since 1963, race relations have become America's number one domestic problem. The great non-violent campaigns of 1961-1963, urban riots of 1963-1967 and the sporadic violence and truce of the ensuing years have dotted the race relations of the decade of the 1960's.

Black Americans have adopted a variety of alternatives, and Black Nationalist movements especially, have developed conceptions of black supremacy in 'reverse compensatory order' to the ideologies of white supremacy. In trying to answer the need of many blacks who search desperately for social status, and a meaningful identity, black nationalist movements seem to fulfill the wishes of the "upwardly mobile" lower-class Negro largely.

Even civil rights activists have linked hands with active protest black nationalists, and acknowledged the need for immediate steps on a massive scale. Many civil rights leaders who abhorred violence, despairing of accomplishing any more by peaceful demonstrations, now admit that a "violent upheaval is inevitable, and, nothing short of one would arouse the nation."<sup>63</sup>

Although, direct action and non-violent tactics of demonstration have been effective to some extent, their impact has decreased considerably both

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<sup>63</sup>Muse, op. cit., pp. 271-275.



on the part of the participant and the audience. For, as the lines of racial confrontation become more clearly drawn, some of the basic dilemmas of the American Negro take the form of apparent ideological differences and conflicts. One such obvious difference is found in an analysis of the relationship between the strategy and philosophy of the late civil rights leader, Martin Luther King, Jr. on the one hand, and the black nationalists, (the Black Muslims) on the other. These two approaches appear to be dramatically opposed: the non-violent, passive resistance of love-for-the-oppressor type civil rights social action doctrine for integration, and the black supremacy and total separation of Negro-from-white philosophy of the black nationalists.<sup>64</sup>

It is easy, therefore, to become preoccupied with the charismatic role of the individual and confuse this with the necessity for systematic strategy and planning for social change. This has been the Negro dilemma. For, living between two alien worlds, the Negro is torn between reasonable and seductive appeals to be statesmenlike in his sense of timing and in his methods, and his deep and persistent awareness that past techniques of negotiation, discussions, and compromises are no longer consistent with contemporary realities.

Beginning on the near side with the conservative churches and progressing into militant congregations - Urban league, the NAACP, the SCLC, the SNCC, CORE, and finally the unknown number of black nationalist organizations - one of the largest and best known, is the Black Muslim

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<sup>64</sup>Clark, op. cit., p. 213.

Movement. C. Eric Lincoln, by offering an analysis of the circumstances out of which the Black Muslim movement was born, stresses its 'psychological heritage.' He writes:

"Protest has been distinctive although frequently a subdued thread widely distributed across the whole fabric of white-black relations throughout the history of white and Negro contact in America..... but from time to time, especially since World War II, there have been varying degrees of adjustments within the system of arrangements, but the power relationship has remained constant."<sup>65</sup>

Thus, a protest movement being an aggressive expression of a subordinated group finds organization out of the resources of the subordinated group to resist the 'coercive' power of the dominant group.

Available records, mentioned in chapter two, show that the Negro did not wait until he was delivered in America to begin his protestation of the white man's concept of the black man's "place" in the caste system. No fewer than fifty-five slave revolts occurred at sea between 1700-1845, and at least one hundred and nine recorded slave insurrections occurred within the continental United States.<sup>66</sup>

And, as slavery became increasingly profitable, "slavocracy" concerned itself with "morally justifying its peculiar institution with an image of the Negro shrewdly designed to discourage protest and to encourage

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<sup>65</sup>Arnold M. Rose and Caroline B. Rose, Eds., Minority Problems (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1965), pp. 220-228.

<sup>66</sup>Lincoln, as quoted by Rose and Rose, Eds., in Minority Problems, Selection 29.

resignation and accommodation. This was accomplished cleverly through the "Myth of the Magnolias."<sup>67</sup>

Even though science and history both have discredited the "Myth of the Magnolias," protest movements among blacks provide the most dramatic refutation above all. The Black Muslims have gone a step further and have now created for themselves a counter myth - the myth of "Black Supremacy".

Seen in this context, and based on theoretical orientation, this writer finds Wallace's "Revitalization Movements," as an appropriate framework for examining the Black Muslim Movement, in relation to organized effort of a subsystem to reconstruct a more satisfying culture by reshaping the identity of its members.

Until quite recently, changing white behavior, attitudes, and laws for rooting out discrimination and ensuring equal treatment toward blacks, had mainly preoccupied the efforts of the civil rights movement. Consequently, it led one to see the race problem exclusively as the white man's problem and not as the Negro's "Negro problem." Therefore, civil rights organizations were encouraged to abstain from attempts to involve the greater bulk of Negro slum dwellers in concerted action for self-improvement in their own behalf. Instead, civil rights technique and doctrine have

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp. 222-223. Myth of the Magnolias - a fantasy of banjo strumming darkies, lounging peacefully under the sweet-scented magnolias (in the South) behind the big house... happy and contented in their station, and forever loyal to the kind-hearted master and his 'arrangements' for their mutual felicities which explained the Negro's condition in terms of "his natural docility, his instinctive servility, and his inherent imbecility." The principal intent of the myth was to perpetuate an image of the Negro as being inherently and intellectually inferior, therefore incapable of mastering the complex requirements of adult citizenship and self-determination.

tried to achieve its goals by doing the job for the people. These moderate organizations strove for the advancement of the black within the framework of the white society.

Recent studies report that most Negroes are becoming more aware that rights and privileges of individuals rest upon the status of the group to which the individual belongs. They also realize that equal opportunities can only be achieved through black individual and community action. Despite some progress, research reports also show that great disparity still exists between a steadily growing, stable middle-class Negro group and an increasingly disadvantaged, socially and economically impotent lower-class Negro group.<sup>68</sup>

While it is important to know the extent of the overall progress the American Negro has made during the crucial years of transition, it is equally vital to note that some blacks, after an examination of destructive cultural and interaction patterns in Negro families moved to the question of how these families might achieve a more stable and gratifying life, have changed their strategy for achieving their goals from one of mild dissent to one of direct action through a voluntary separatist ideology. At the same time it is important to recognize that precisely because lower-class Negroes are beginning to redefine themselves in relation to the Negro image portrayed by the middle-class, and are attracted to it, they are also repelled by it because their actual life changes do not permit genuine identification or social mobility with the middle-class whites or Negroes

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<sup>68</sup>Parsons and Clark (Eds.), The Negro American (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin Co., 1966), pp. 194-198.

in open society. This estrangement creates the beginning of class consciousness and conflict because of status incongruence among the Negro masses.

Several factors in the contemporary social situation of Negroes help to explain the growing sense of separateness and ethnic consciousness among the Negro masses; the bifurcation of the Negro caste, i.e., the emergence of a real Negro middle-class and the Negro's redefinition of himself not only in terms of the whites but in relation to this "new" class; his re-definition of himself in relation to Africa; and his reactions to the traditional Negro institutions and leadership groups in terms of these new definitions.<sup>69</sup>

Black resentment is expressed in defiance of all white men and their compliant "Negro" friends. It is therefore, directed not only against the white power complex but against the monopoly of middle-class Negro leadership as well. For, the Negro lives in a 'no-man's-land between two alien worlds,' both of which he spurns. Hence, what has he to lose if the demagogues of black nationalism openly fan his resentment into hatred.

This background of tension and change flowed from the neglect of lower-class interest on the part of traditional Negro institutions and Negro leaders and the failure of white society to extend equality and opportunity to the Negro masses. The desperate effort of a controversial, vocal, but somewhat numerically insignificant but growing minority of lower-class Negroes have emerged in such a context of change. In the light of limited alternatives open to these Negroes, black nationalists through

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<sup>69</sup>Essein-Udon, op. cit., pp. 354-355.

the Black Muslim ideology with its moral and economic reforms, provides a way out for this disadvantaged people. It welcomes and promises to rehabilitate the most 'unregenerate' - the alcoholic, the ex-convict, the pimps, the prostitute.' For, no man is condemned by the Muslims for what he was - only for what he refuses to be. Thus, the challenge of an ascetic ideal balanced by the absence of social barriers to affiliation and service, parallels the Black Muslim Movement's promise to assist its members by simply reversing the process toward assimilation by means of militant separatism.

What better alternative could then exist for meeting the urgent needs of the Negro masses except through an appeal to black initiative itself?

Many blacks in the United States are devoting themselves to the serious task of searching for an identity. They seem to be in the process of becoming an 'ethnic' group after a long period of being a 'collectivity of unrelated individuals. The community of tradition, sentiment, culture etc.,' that has marked other populations and given rise to ethnic groups such as the other immigrants, would serve as a vehicle for establishing an identity.

In certain respects the Negro protest of the last decade has some similarities with what was called the "Negro Renaissance" of the 1920's. One of the important developments that took place in the Afro-American community was the acute awakening of a vast number of blacks to the tremendous discrepancies between the democratic rights and liberties as set forth in the Constitution and the enjoyment of these rights and liberties by the black community. Afro-Americans, especially during the post-World War I

period, when thousands of Negroes were being lynched, exploited, and otherwise oppressed, became bitter and began to express their resentment in a variety of artistic ways.

For the most part, the literature of the Black Renaissance protested segregation, discrimination, and terrorism, and demanded first class citizenship. Then, as now, there was a mood of black nationalism rejecting everything white and everything American. It was eventually turned into a movement of militant pride and black nationalism by groups such as the Garveyites, who confused and confounded many blacks but sought respite for the oppressed Afro-American masses by organizing the "back-to-Africa" movement. Neither Garveyite nor black nationalist movement generated enough action to change the ideas of many dominant whites, they believed there was more power in socially organized masses than in declarations of good intentions and wishful optimism.<sup>70</sup>

How is self-improvement to be achieved by the Negro masses? The low-income Negro striving for advancement, is circumscribed by the awareness of the fact that there is unequal distribution of political and economic power between blacks and whites. The strategy of the Negro protest amounts to this:

"... the solitary Negro seeking admission into the white world through unusual achievement, is now replaced by the organized Negro insisting upon a legitimate share for his group of the goods of the American society..."<sup>71</sup>

That is the contemporary legacy of the earlier black protest movements.

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<sup>70</sup> Kenneth G. Goode, From Africa to the United States and Then... (Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1969), p. 126.

<sup>71</sup> Lewis M. Killian, The Impossible Revolution: Black Power and the American Dream (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 138.

## Rise of the Black Muslim Movement\*

### Its Founder

Ever since Marcus Garvey's unsuccessful 'Back-to-Africa' movement, some American Negroes have shared his 'separatist' view point, and small black nationalist organizations have been formed. In essence, the philosophy of these movements states that the white man is adamantly opposed to ever giving Negroes genuine equality in white societies, and that Black Americans should stay apart from white society as much as possible. Black Muslims have demanded not equality but separation from the white man.

The "lost-Found Nation of Islam"<sup>72</sup> in North America," is a mushrooming sect of black Americans, led by some of the country's angriest young men. It has been described as a 'politico-religious' anti-white organization, preaching and advocating black nationalism, and claiming 'hundreds of thousands' of member throughout the United States.

The Black Muslim Movement made 'black' the ideal and ultimate value for disillusioned blacks. That movement may be viewed as a "deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a subordinated society to reconstruct a more satisfying identity for its members."

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\*This evaluation is primarily the result of extensive readings from contributory literature assembled over the past decade by C. Eric Lincoln, and Essein-Udom.

<sup>72</sup>Essein-Udom, op. cit., p. 147.



### Black Muslim Ideology and Organization

Black separatism has been a logical extension of the view of black power. It has emphasized that black people should segregate socially from whites, administer their own affairs, increase black businesses, implement black studies programs in schools and colleges, and strive for collective unity among blacks. The separatists have contributed to the rising image of the blacks and to the expression of "black pride."

Since black nationalist movements have developed conceptions of black supremacy, they have answered a need for many blacks who search desperately for status and identity. Black Muslims, whose principal source of recruitment is the black ghetto, exploit the situation by offering a way out to the lower-class Negro who exists on the dirty streets and in crowded tenements where life is cheap and hope is minimal. Often the Black Muslim's is the only message directed to those lower income blacks who the larger society has forgotten.

Unlike the typical Christian church, the Muslim temples attract many more men than women. Men assume full management of temple affairs.

Selected men belong to the (FOI) - Fruit of Islam, a "secret army" which acts as a security force at temple meetings. The FOI does not initiate aggression, it responds with force to any encroachments on its honor. The muslim leaders work to restore the socially emasculated Negro male to the responsible headship in a patriarchal family structure.

Women are honored. They perform important functions within a definite role; they are not in any sense regarded as "property." However, they do not constitute the organizational foundation through which the Movement functions, either in service or in finance. They work alongside of men in

various business enterprises owned by the Muslim temples, mostly in roles not in conflict with the male assumption of primary responsibility. Black Muslim women, however, are placed on a pedestal, honored, and taught to sew, cook, keep house, rear children, care for their husbands and families, and behave at home and abroad.

The Black Muslim movement inspires its members toward high standards of group and individual morality, cleanliness, thrift, honesty, sexual morality, abstinence from intoxicating liquor, and steady jobs. The Muslims are no longer fragmented and alienated individuals, but members of an integral and significant social unit. By stressing in their separatist programs, the achievements of blacks, and by making blacks aware of their potential for development Black Muslims have inspired a measure of meaningful identity for lower-class Negroes, and have imbued them with confidence for development apart from and without the aid of white society. Unlike some upper and middle class blacks, they lack any desire to be white or even appear as white.

However, substantive freedom and a style of life - material, cultural, moral, and a sense of dignity cannot be bestowed upon a people who do not want them or are not prepared to help themselves and make sacrifices necessary for their attainment. Black Muslims assert that if they are to gain respect from others, that if they are to be regarded as human beings rather than as social 'outcasts' - they must become consciously aware of their predicament, and their degradation first, and then create conditions to overcome their problems by taking advantage of the opportunities however limited they may be.

Furthermore, the Black Muslims believe that as 'Negroes' become a more focused and organized ethnic group, they may define one end of the spectrum of Negro responses and affect the thinking of all other so-called Negroes. And, because of the impact of this upon whites, they may yet contribute to the general struggle for Negro aspirations in a pluralistic society despite their (the Muslim's) separatist orientation.

### Growth

Black Muslims have become one of the largest and most articulate, separatist organizations in America today. The movement was started in Detroit in the 1930's by one named Wali Fard, an orthodox Muslim presumably born in Mecca about 1877. He arrived in the black ghetto and told the people who gathered to hear him that his mission was to "wake the 'Dead Nation in the West'; to teach them the truth about the white man, and to prepare them for the Armageddon." Fard disappeared mysteriously in 1934 and was succeeded by Elijah Muhammad, his lieutenant, who has remained the organization's leader ever since.

### Membership

The exact membership of the movement remains a controversy, because Muslim leaders do not release exact membership figures. The Muslims claim some 250,000 followers but outside observers estimate not more than 100,000 members. The members are predominantly Negro male, and lower-class. Up to eighty per cent of a typical congregation is between the ages of seventeen and thirty-five. This pattern has been noted again and again across the country. In the newer temples youth is even more pronounced. The reason

for such a concentration of youth is clear, for this is an activist movement, and the appeal is directed to youth. Large young families, too, are eagerly sought, and least attention is paid to older people who were reared as Christians.

## CHAPTER IV

### IMPACT OF BLACK MUSLIM IDEOLOGY ON LOWER-CLASS BLACKS

#### Major Problems of Lower-Class, Urban Blacks

Although the incidence of poverty in America has been decreasing in a generally expanding economy, the benefits of this prosperity have not been shared equally by all portions of the population. Despite the war on poverty and the passage of several civil rights bills, poverty is still a major problem for the Black American.<sup>73</sup>

Currently, there are two basic approaches to this question: one places more emphasis upon factors external to the black community; the other focuses upon factors within it.

Since 1960, Black Americans have become more urbanized than white, and now over 75 percent live in urban areas.<sup>74</sup> But in these areas in the urban cities, they do not find the 'promised land.' Instead, they have found overcrowded, sub-standard housing, a scarcity of decent jobs for which they are qualified, and apparently, indifferent whites who are preoccupied with their 'suburban seclusion.'<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>U.S. Department of Labor, Report No. 332, Social and Economic Conditions of Negroes in the United States. Current Population Reports. Series P. 23, No. 24, (October, 1967), p. xi.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>David A. Schulz, Coming Up Black: Patterns of Ghetto Socialization (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), Chapter 6.

The problems of the urban, black family, in the last decade especially, have come into national focus. Recent racial riots as well, have drawn attention to the increasing problems of the ghetto. Now, both black and white have begun to realize that something constructive must be done because welfare and ameliorative devices and legal protection are insufficient to cope with the adverse conditions perpetuated by the urban, lower-class black's intergenerational poverty. All this, and discrimination undoubtedly, have been the major external factors which have contributed to black impoverishment.

On the other hand, the focus on factors within the black community has tended to concentrate on the structure of black families which is said to 'perpetuate' poverty for the lower-class black.

Is it possible that if external effort and internal endeavor could occur simultaneously, distortions could be set right and the cycle of poverty, too, could be broken?

Even though no specific national policy is underway for meeting the problems of the lower-class blacks, the emphasis on family structure favors treating family pathologies before basic economic reform.<sup>76</sup> Organizations such as the NAACP, the National Urban League, and other civil rights movements - for all their virtues, tend to comprise of middle- and upper-class Negroes and whites - the least 'disprivilaged' of their race. And, although the blacks stand to benefit most from their services, their

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<sup>76</sup>The United States Dept. of Labor, Office of Planning and Research, *The Negro Family: The Case For National Action* (Washington, D.C., The U.S. Govt. Pr. Press), p. 47.

philosophy is not directed toward them, nor has it caught the imagination and adherence of the black masses.

### Consequences of Black Muslim Ideology

Negro leadership in America - politicians, intellectuals, and businessmen - has been uniformly dedicated to the principle of cooperation with the white man in any attempt to relieve the Negro's condition. Negro leadership, prior to advocates of Black Power, has never seriously considered whether the Negro might solve his problem without help. Few, if any, have been challenged to treat family 'pathologies' and to conduct basic economic reform simultaneously for blacks. One black nationalist group, the Black Muslims have undertaken this task. Being depressed themselves, they have capitalized on the desperate character of the social situation of lower-class blacks those most estranged from the larger society and from other blacks as well. By capturing the imagination of this segment of the suppressed, inarticulate, and dissatisfied black masses, Black Muslims are confident of meeting at least some of their urgent needs through their unique appeal to black initiative itself for black leadership.

Usually, when all else fails, religion ultimately addresses itself to human needs. It gives meaning and depth to life in face of experiences that appear meaningless and shallow. And, it may also concentrate the strength of the individual or community for an immediate challenge to intolerable injustices or repression.

Powered by the strength of their belief, religious innovators, therefore, often seek solutions appropriate to the enormity of problems experienced by their adherents who are most acutely affected and

overburdened by frustrations, or a sense of failure through the disruptive effects of hostility.<sup>77</sup>

In this respect, the Black Muslim movement has been evaluated as an exceptional, religious means of response and adjustment for bringing relief to its all-black community of believers. The movement strives to achieve power when all other sources fail, and to establish order and meaning in the face of disorganization and suffering which other efforts have failed to eliminate. For the oppressed black, such remote hope is more acceptable than the present reality of painful and unacceptable circumstances.

Apart from this identity as a religious vehicle for innovating change under most adverse circumstances, the growth and attractiveness of the Muslim movement for the black masses, have also been viewed in terms of its appeal as a revitalized movement. As such, this movement has a symbol of hope which draws the destitute to membership. For, it is not present suffering but future expectation that impels the dissatisfied and the deprived blacks to unite in protest in their own behalf, and discover escape from apathy through a Black-Muslim-style "mazeway."

Elijah Muhammad's ideological concoctions or racial mysticism call for a 'unique effort' to reconstruct the Negro's soul by regenerating his moral and social values. Such moral and social reforms provide a way out for these oppressed blacks into a "Muslim Community." The Muslims claim that they find 'peace of mind' and 'happiness' in their 'own community'

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<sup>77</sup>J. M. Yinger, *Religion, Society, and the Individual* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company), p. 9.



among their 'own kind,' not with 'strangers,' and not in 'integration!'<sup>78</sup>

But the discovery of one's identity and community is not enough for the Muslims. A deliberate course of action for promoting one's self-interest and that of the community as a whole, must also be promoted. In order to accomplish this task reorganization of a special nature is needed. The Muslims characterize theirs as being "oligarchic, militant, and highly disciplined."<sup>79</sup>

It is difficult to draw specific conclusions when attempting, (1) to evaluate the complex "in-process" type of changes that are being initiated by a small segment of lower-class blacks, (2) to extricate a single process of change from a complex set of changes occurring concurrently. Yet, not to take note of some progress made in this direction would be unfair.

Much has been said of late, and often with mixed emotion about the lower-class black family.<sup>80</sup> That topic has been controversial.<sup>81</sup> However, there is the belief that action is needed to remedy the too long existing adverse conditions. Two views are taken: the acute crisis view suggests that primary attention be given to the family as such; the other view

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<sup>78</sup>Essein-Udom, op. cit., p. 198.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>80</sup>For example, it is generally agreed that, (1) a harmonious two-parent home is better than a one-parent home both for children as well as their parents, (2) that fatherless homes are more frequent among blacks than among whites.

<sup>81</sup>The controversy centers mainly on the causes for the breakdown of the lower-class black family, and the way to remedy the problem - whether remedial action should primarily focus on intrafamily or extrafamily problems.

suggests that the best way to strengthen low-income families as families, is to give primary attention to building up the economic and social status of the black male. The Black Muslims favor the latter category.

Among Muslims, the father is the undisputed head of the family, and responsibility and welfare of the family lies with the black male. This represents a shift, in that Muslims shift from the mother-child axis - characteristic of the Negro lower-class subculture - to the paternal-centered family. The Muslim view is a significant departure from the traditional norms of the subculture. Such a significant change may be understood in terms of an evolutionary process within the black community.

In a recent study of Black Muslim and Negro Christian family relationships,<sup>82</sup> it was found that relationships in the Muslim family were legitimized on the basis of respect and acceptance of the role and position of the male spouse as one of sole authority by the female spouse, who, in turn, accepts her own role as being supportive. Traditionally, the lower-class Negro family has not been organized on a foundation of primary authority. It was also observed that Muslim men preferred that their wives not work outside the home. From the above observation it appears that under failure of compensatory action on part of the dominant white society, to remedy long-standing conditions of stress for blacks, the Muslims tend to act in their own interest through the religious strategy of Black Muslim ideology. (See Table 1).

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<sup>82</sup>See Journal of Marriage and the Family, Vol. 30, No.4, November, 1968.

TABLE 1  
BLACK MUSLIM AND NEGRO CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIPS  
COMPARATIVE STUDY RESULTS

Husband - Wife Relationship regarding:	Muslim	Christian
Work	Adult Male: productive contributive bread winner. Adult Female: good wife and mother.	Adult Male and Female roles undefined - dependent on economic situation.
Authority	Vested with the adult male.	Usually vested with the adult female because of income production.
Decision-making	Most decisions affecting the family were made by the adult male.	Same as above.
Use of leisure time	Less idling and "killing time" activities.	More "idling" and "killing time" activities

The implication that some relationship exists between a sense of identity and a desire for self-improvement and social mobility, is strongly suggested by the behavior of the Muslims. The resoluteness and determination with which the Muslims try to improve themselves and thereby gain recognition from others, is very evident of a deliberate and conscious effort on their part to construct a more satisfying future.

It is unlikely that the Negro, being a significant minority will ever have a major influence upon the decision-making process of his country until

he either controls a significant segment of the economy or gains greater political recognition. Whereas most blacks aspire for either of these two possibilities, the Black Muslims work in reverse independently.

The Muslims have a system of values perceived to be consistent with the realities of existing circumstances for blacks. They resist assimilation and avoid token interracial participation in the life of the community, they sustain themselves on the philosophy of black supremacy which eliminates the embarrassment of a subordinate status.

Thus, by repudiating all external help, and by disassociating themselves from membership with the larger society and even from the general Negro subgroup, Black Muslims are putting black potential to a severe test. So far, this unique pursuit seems to be functional for its adherents. Evidence of this lies in James Baldwin's tribute to the accomplishments of the Black Muslim ideology of almost a decade ago:

"Elijah Muhammad has been able to do what generations of welfare workers and committees, resolutions and reports, housing projects and playgrounds have failed to do... to heal and redeem the drunkards and the junkies, to convert people who have come out of prisons and keep them out, to make men chaste and women virtuous... and to invest both male and female with a pride and serenity that hang about them like an unfailing light..."<sup>83</sup>

How prominent and successful Black Muslims will prove in their effort, will depend far more upon the process of integration acceptable to some blacks, and how honest the integrationists are in permanently satisfying the growing needs and aspirations of all classes of needy blacks.

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<sup>83</sup>James Baldwin, Letters From the Region in My Mind, 38 New Yorker 59 at 92, November 17, 1962.

The Value of Revitalization Theory  
for the Analysis of Social Movements

Wallace's definition of a revitalization movement implies an organismic analogy, (See Chapter I, page 3). Through this analogy society is seen as an organic system which is constantly being exposed to stress induced in its component subsystems. Various agencies can be responsible for interference with the efficiency of the system. Extreme pressures often result from internal conflicts and economic distress. While the individual can tolerate a moderate degree of increased stress and still maintain the habitual way of behavior, a point is reached at which some alternative way must be considered.

Through the process of revitalization, the total system is able to maintain itself by providing mechanisms, i.e., a change in the "mazeway" sufficient to handle the stress. The deliberate, organized, and conscious effort of members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture, can also lead to a point of crystallization for peoples stripped of their identity under pressures of acculturation.

The sociological significance of the revitalization theory therefore, lies in the ability of the revitalized movement to frequently rescue or delay a total culture or subsystem of a society from disaster and destruction.

The Black Muslim movement has been viewed as an "in-process" revitalized movement according to Wallace's terminology as the "deliberate, organized, and conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture" for themselves.

The Black Muslim movement exhibits several phases of a revitalized movement which Wallace has suggested: its Nativistic phase puts emphasis on the elimination of alien persons, customs, and values; its Revivalistic phase emphasizes reinstitutionalization of customs and values thought to have been present in the "mazeway" of previous generations; the Millenarian aspect of the movement stresses mazeway transformation in an apocalyptic world where transformation is engineered by the supernatural; and its Messianic character emphasizes the participation of a divine savior in human flesh in the mazeway transformation.

#### Future Trends for the Black Muslim Movement

Success and failure of this black nationalist movement, especially one that practices separatism, will depend largely on the relative impact its restructured doctrine has on its members and the satisfactory payoff they receive from the practice of its rigid discipline.

How prominent and successful the Black Muslims will prove in their effort, will depend far more upon the process of integration acceptable to some blacks, and how honest the integrationists are in permanently satisfying the growing needs and aspiration of all classes of needy blacks.

According to Wallace, the success and failure of a revitalized movement depends largely on two related variables: the relative "realism" of the doctrine, and the amount of force executed against the organization by its opponents. If the doctrine is unrealistic and cannot predict successfully the consequences of its own and its opponent's moves in a power struggle, its demise seems likely. But where the conflict-realism is high and the resistance from its opponents low, the movement is well on its

way to achieving routinization. Also, whether the reconstructed culture is satisfying will depend on whether its "mazeway" formulations lead to stress reducing actions.

Findings from Edward's research support the fact that the "mazeway" formulation adopted by the Black Muslims evidenced more advantageous conditions for the Muslim families than the non-Muslim, families.

One may go on to speculate what are the sources of strength for the remarkable but numerically small, black nationalist movement, who by advocating complete separation from whites have succeeded in independently promoting economic self-sufficiency, personal dignity, and racial pride, for a segment of lower-class, urban blacks.

Although a severe access problem exists with regard to researching more aspects of the Black Muslims, chances are that as the Muslim movement becomes aware of its public posture and particularly its image with intellectuals and social scientists gains favor and importance, the movement will become more and more amenable to scientific research.

**APPENDIX**



### Observation and Personal View

Summer work involvement as an international student has taken me into several ghetto areas of the northern United States. Such an experience has provided unusual opportunities for me to directly observe several pulses of the American Negro community which is now making a determined struggle for a creative and meaningful existence.

As camp counselor for welfare and ADC (Aid to Dependent Children) recipients at an integrated camp at Algonquin, Chicago, Illinois, in the summer of 1966, I observed no Black Muslim families among the many mother-child minority groups selected to vacation at the camp.

Next summer I served as an international VISTA volunteer for The Commonwealth Service Corps' educational summer program in Boston, Massachusetts. Again, I found no Black Muslim school children registered in the free summer tutorial project organized by a local agency. In fact, neither the Neighborhood Youth Corps included any Black Muslim youth trainees who assisted the regular VISTA volunteer teachers.

However, my desire to meet some Black Muslims was soon materialized. During the first half of my two and a half month stay in Boston, it was arranged by the local CSC (Commonwealth Service Corps) that I should live in the ghetto area with other VISTA volunteers as a paying guest. Two white volunteers and I lived with the Arkeems, a young, black Muslim couple in Roxbury, Massachusetts.

In every respect this couple insisted on extending special hospitality to me explaining that I was a "guest" in the United States from an Asian country and therefore must receive "good" care. They felt obligated to make my stay in their home a memorable one. I appreciated their

consideration even though it caused embarrassment and tension between myself and the two local white VISTA volunteers.

During my stay in Boston, I came informally into contact with several local black nationalist and Black Muslim groups. Most of them appeared pleased to know I was from an Asian country. Besides a genuine interest in the cultural aspects of various Asian nations, their conversation usually involved discussion on colonial ills and its ultimate overthrow by several "freedom-loving" people. Several, however, appeared apprehensive over my involvement with an O. E. O. federal program in the ghetto. On the whole, I was well accepted and able to interact and communicate better than other volunteers with the Muslims. It is my personal observation that ghetto blacks perhaps feel a distinct need to safely identify with non-white first before being able to communicate with outsiders.

My last indirect contact in Boston was with Brother Armstrong, 6X of Dorchester Temple in Massachusetts. On several occasions I received literature concerning the Black Muslims as well as special copies of the weekly newspaper, Muhammad Speaks. In spite of my several requests for specific information, I received no written reply to my inquiries.

In the summer of 1968, I visited The Kansas City Temple on a Sunday afternoon in July. There I was impressed by a number of unusual procedures - especially the 'search.'

A local O. E. O. worker accompanied me to the Temple. As we entered the hall an FOI member directed us to the women's check room. There a 'sister' - a polite Muslim style of addressing all non-white women - asked our names and purpose of our visit. Then she summoned another sister who searched us meticulously from head to toe while the former continued with

polite conversation explaining that this was a routine and I should not be offended by the procedure.

Next, my pocketbook was taken from me and inspected thoroughly for any 'harmful' items. A pen, a nail file, a tube of lipstick and note paper were removed without my permission and put in a paper sack. My name was marked on this sack. My pocketbook was returned to me with my billfold intact right away and the items in the sack after the meeting. We were allowed to enter the auditorium after these formalities and led to seats in the womens' section. We sat behind two rows of other Black Muslim women - 'sisters' - who were immaculately dressed in long, floor length white, silk robes, and head dresses. There was no evidence of any makeup or perfume - only a clean, healthy smell.

The meeting lasted two full hours. The main theme involved interpretation of current political trends through Biblical references; and their ultimate solution through Muslim ideology. The event of the Resurrection City, then underway, was strongly condemned.

After the meeting I was invited to join several of the group for the usual Sunday dinner. This was especially prepared in the KOSHER food restaurant and coffee house adjacent to the Temple. Having another appointment, I declined but later returned to talk to as many of the Black Muslims that I could find.

On learning that my interest was purely academic and therefore temporary, I sensed a certain apprehension in the half-hearted replies to my inquiries. I was told I could attend their meetings and discussions but the chances for interviewing any specific Black Muslim families for purpose of research were slim. I was unable to determine the exact number

of Black Muslim families in this Kansas City area but I estimate 100-150 to be pretty accurate.

My last contact in the midwest with Black Muslims was with Muhammad Ali - Cassius Clay - in the spring of 1969. In spite of the tight schedule in Manhattan, Kansas, he was gracious enough to let me interview him. Much of his replies to my questions regarding recent activities and accomplishments of the Black Muslims in general had already appeared in the March, 1969 TIME magazine article.

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THE BLACK MUSLIMS: A CONTEMPORARY  
REVITALIZED MOVEMENT

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

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requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

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This report has examined several social and cultural factors which have caused intense problems for several generations of Black Americans in the past.

An attempt has been made through review of literature and available research findings, to evaluate the social significance of these adverse factors on blacks, and to ascertain the alternative yet often ineffective techniques which most deprived lower-class blacks have adopted in their own behalf for bringing about change.

The Black Muslims, it is found, have made a deliberate effort by resorting to a more radical approach to implement change through a well-organized, and an all-black movement. This movement seeks voluntary separation from whites and other middle class blacks in order to avoid further status, social, and economic deprivation. Such an approach appears to be proving a successful self-help effort for upgrading social, cultural, and moral standards of lower-class blacks.

The Black Muslim movement is viewed in Wallace's terminology of a revitalization movement defined as the "deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture," for themselves.

The success and failure of the Black Muslim movement, however, will depend on the relative impact its revitalized doctrine and restructured approach has on its members, and the degree to which these members are able to conform to the rigid discipline which Black Muslims practice and expect of their adherents.