

Malcolm X

## Going Back to Our Own

### Interpreting Malcolm X's Transition From "Black Asiatic" to "Afro-American"

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The thing that has made the so-called Negro in America fail, more than any other thing, is your, my, lack of knowledge concerning history.

—*Malcolm X, December 1962*<sup>1</sup>

Imam Benjamin Karim (formerly Benjamin 2X) clearly remembers the day in late December 1962 when he introduced Minister Malcolm X to over one thousand Muslims and other curious folk packed into Harlem's Mosque No. 7, anxious to hear Malcolm speak on "Black Man's History."<sup>2</sup> In this lecture Malcolm detailed the disparate genealogies of "Black Asiatics" and white Europeans, focusing most of his energy on the devilish nature of whites. Malcolm ended the talk with a summary of the Nation of Islam's eschatological beliefs, centered on the imminent destruction of the white man. It is clear from the quote above that Malcolm was also arguing that history is the key to collective empowerment. Here Malcolm may have been drawing from his own personal experience: he rose from a young inmate doomed to failure in 1946 to the second most sought-after speaker on college campuses in 1964,<sup>3</sup> propelled by the "true knowledge" he acquired along the way. According to *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Malcolm's successful conversion to the Nation of Islam was, in part, facilitated by the revelation that Black people are systematically denied representation in history books. While in prison, the notion of a suppressed, glorious history of the Black man "struck" Malcolm profoundly and inspired reading marathons in his jail cell. The NOI's focus on history, according to Malcolm, was "one reason why Mr. Muhammad's teachings spread so swiftly all over the United States, among *all* Negroes, whether or not they became followers."<sup>4</sup> It is not surprising, then, that Karim fondly recalls how Malcolm X engaged his audiences by indicting white America for silencing Black history. Malcolm perfected this rhetorical method during his tenure as the Nation's spokesman, and continued to use it even when the content of his speeches had shifted rather dramatically. Although many scholars have rightly argued that Malcolm's religious transformation while on Hajj in 1964 was largely

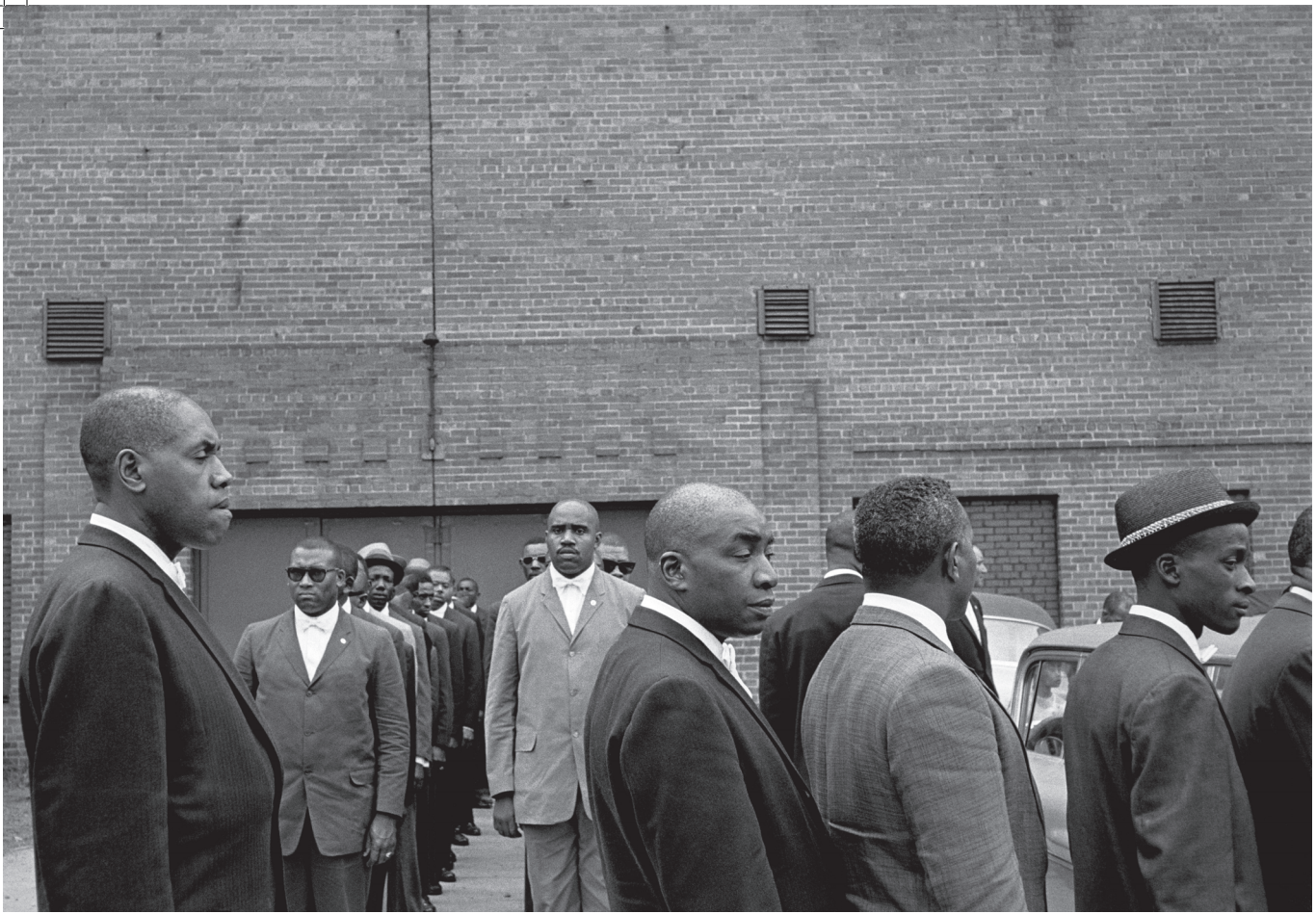
overdrawn in the *Autobiography*, examining the origin of and apparent shift in Malcolm's self-identity—from "Black Asiatic" to "Afro-American"—helps us understand Malcolm's post-NOI political philosophy. This shift adds another layer of complexity to the increasingly hostile relationship between the Nation and Malcolm in 1964 and 1965.

The issue of identity has been overlooked by most Malcolm X scholars.<sup>5</sup> Ethnic identities are manifestations of experience; interrogating the ways Malcolm X identified himself is one way to access his experience. The scholars that do address Malcolm's abandonment of the Nation of Islam's race theory posit it in terms of his *religious* experience in Asia and Africa. My goal is to frame this transition in terms of his *political* experience and maturation in 1964. In doing so, this essay will also discuss the ironically central place of European anthropology in the NOI's (re)construction of Black identity by delineating the genealogy of the term "Black Asiatic." After leaving the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X not only fully rejected Elijah Muhammad's race-based theology, he also repudiated his Black Asiatic identity. Moreover, through his experiences in Africa in 1964, Malcolm X came to realize that the Nation of Islam perpetuated a racist, colonialist perspective of Africa and its people. I will begin by situating aspects of early NOI theology within the broader context of African-American religion in the early twentieth century.

## Subversive Genealogies: Emphasizing Name and Place

The industrial age of the early twentieth century marked a period of exponential development in the diversification of African-American religion. The emergence of hundreds of small-scale sects was due mainly to the mass migration of rural, southern Blacks to the urban North from 1915 to 1930. Several circumstances encouraged millions of people to migrate, the primary reasons being natural disasters that impeded farming productivity (such as the destruction of crops by the Mexican boll weevil and soil erosion) and the increased demand for cheap labor in the period between the wars. Racial tensions in the rural South, particularly a horrific rise in lynching, also compelled Blacks to migrate; however, life was not much better once they arrived in the northern cities. The enormous population shift, xenophobic northerners, and the reemergence of the Ku Klux Klan ignited a great number of race riots in city streets. Riots in Chicago and East St. Louis claimed eighty-five lives and injured well over one thousand people. Race-based violence culminated in the Red Summer of 1919, during which twenty-six riots broke out in the overpopulated northern cities. It is within this context of tense race relations and a feeling of displacement that certain African-American religious sects, such as the Moorish Science Temple, emerged.<sup>6</sup>

African Americans in the rural South often gathered in small-scale Baptist and Methodist communities that offered temporary refuge from the social and economic inequalities they encountered daily. Upon arrival in the North, many migrants discovered that despite the variety of religious denominations from which to choose, small-scale community centers and congregations were absent from urban life. Indeed, the population explosion over-extended many of the established Baptist and Methodist churches. For some of the migrants, their lively approach to worship, familial connection to the church, and social status clashed with urban sensibilities. The anthropologists Hans Baer and Merrill Singer observe that "in addition to seeming more bureaucratic, impersonal, formal, and sedate than their counterparts in the South, the established congregations increasingly adapted themselves to the more secular concerns of a new Black middle class."<sup>7</sup> Consequently, many poor migrants felt that these churches were inadequate for their particular needs. New storefront and house churches were thus established by many south-



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ern Blacks as locations for those with similar feelings of oppression and displacement; they were also places to comfortably reminisce about their former churches in the South. The types of sects that emerged ranged from the integrated, eclectic Father Divine Peace Mission, to a separatist Black Jewish sect that called itself the Church of God.<sup>8</sup> These congregations were directed by charismatic leaders, who, in many cases, were formerly preachers in the South. Arthur Fauset's seminal 1944 urban ethnography, *Black Gods of the Metropolis*, describes and contrasts a motley set of new religious movements. His first-hand experience with these "cults" is useful in explaining their appeal:

Negroes are attracted to the cults for the obvious reason that with few normal outlets of expression... the cults offer on one hand the boon of religion . . . and on the other hand they provide for certain Negroes with imagination and other dynamic qualities, in an atmosphere free from embarrassment or apology, a place where they may experiment in activities such as business, politics, social reform, and social expression. . .<sup>9</sup>

These newly established religious sects offered much more to followers than a creed and a space in which to worship. The attempt to build Black-owned and -operated businesses reflected a surge in Black Nationalist thought among the masses, engendered most famously by Marcus Garvey's political movement, which took root in the U.S. in 1916. The Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) provided the social and political blueprint from which most sectarian leaders constructed their ideologies. Garvey's message was directed towards struggling lower-class and working-class people of African descent, especially concerning their economic position and lack of political voice in the



cities. Garvey proposed a “Back to Africa” program, which sought to return diaspora Africans to the motherland to create a unified nation of Black people.<sup>10</sup>

Although forging unity among all people of African descent was at the heart of the UNIA, Garvey apparently did make an effort to identify his struggling people with a specific geographic location: Ethiopia.<sup>11</sup> The reasons for Garvey’s explicit identification with Ethiopia is undoubtedly due to its remarkable ancient (Christian) civilization, its role in biblical prophecy, and the Bible’s generic use of the term “Ethiopian” when referring to Africans. Not surprisingly, Garvey’s Christian beliefs and political philosophy were inextricable. He firmly believed that with faith in one God, Black people would “rise up with their risen Lord and take a firm hold of their heritage as made in God’s image, expressed in the soil of Africa, and act courageously to become fully human...”<sup>12</sup> Paradoxically, Garvey’s mission was for people of African descent to realize self-determination, but also to civilize and Christianize Africans. Given his identification with Ethiopia and emphasis on the beauty of Blackness, it is curious that Garvey considered the Negro to be blood brothers with “North Africans, some Indians and even southern Europeans.”<sup>13</sup> Garvey focused a great deal of energy on describing the wealth of long-lost kingdoms in Africa as a way to imagine the possibilities for Africa that lie ahead. His talent for using the past to empower people in the present would be emulated by many—including ministers of the Nation of Islam—in the decades to come.

At the same time that Garvey was spreading his Christian-oriented, Black Nationalist message, Timothy “Noble” Drew “Ali” developed his version of Islam. Drew Ali established the Moorish Science Temple of America (MSTA) in 1913 in Newark, New Jersey. Arguing that racism is inextricably woven into the fabric of American Christianity, Drew Ali sought to evade the numerous problems confronting poor Blacks by teaching them his own unique melange of theologies under the umbrella of “Islam.” He selected excerpts of teachings from four texts: the Qur’an, the Bible, *The Aquarian Gospels of Jesus Christ*, and *Unto Thee I Grant*, but was also influenced by Garveyism, Theosophy, Sufism, and the Shriners.<sup>14</sup>

Through his religious teachings, Noble Drew Ali attempted to replace a race category, “Negro,” with an ethnic category. He taught that African Americans are “Asiatics” or “Moors” whose ancestors were forcibly removed from Morocco, enslaved, and stripped of their cultural and religious heritage.<sup>15</sup> Parallel to Malcolm’s contention that a people are doomed to failure without knowledge of history, Drew Ali believed that “the name means everything; by taking the Asiatic’s name from him . . . the European stripped the Moor of his power, his authority, his God and every other worth-while possession.”<sup>16</sup> Drew Ali claimed that African Americans are the descendants of the Biblical Moabites. It is peculiar that in developing the idea of an Asiatic identity, Drew Ali focused on a tribe who once inhabited the Asian region now known as Jordan, yet he situated the tribe in Africa. Rather than associate African Americans with heathen tribes of sub-Saharan Africa, however, Drew Ali’s genealogical theory centered on a bloc of ethnicities that represented what he considered to be the civilized, “original Asiatic nations.” Historian Richard Brent Turner lists these nations:

Noble Drew Ali maintained that a series of peoples were the descendants of Canaan and Ham and therefore the original Asiatic nations. Among them he numbered the Egyptians, the Arabians, the Japanese, the Chinese, the Indians, the people of South America and Central America, the Turks, and the African Americans.<sup>17</sup>

Drew Ali rejected the terms “Negro,” “Black,” and “colored,” maintaining that his African-American followers were “olive-skinned.”<sup>18</sup> He was so vehement in eschewing the labels attached to his people by whites, that Drew Ali “regarded any persons who

accepted legal designations as ‘Blacks,’ ‘Coloreds,’ and ‘Negroes’ as non-citizens” and “constitutionally-mandated ‘undesirables,’ subject to whatever molestations or ‘granted privileges’ which the said legal government chose to bestow upon them.”<sup>19</sup> Drew Ali believed so strongly in the power of signification that he would rather submit to the abusive American legal system than hear his people refer to themselves in disparaging ways.

While the MSTA may have succeeded in envisioning an alternate ethnicity which symbolically reversed the imposed feeling of inferiority and deflected self-hatred, the movement ultimately did little in the way of actively improving conditions. Moreover, it failed to generate a sense of pride in the great spectrum of dark skin color and in African roots. Despite his reverence for and adoption of portions of Garvey’s teachings, Drew Ali’s esoteric Orientalist theology hardly dealt with Africa, save the presumed Asiatic presence in Morocco and Egypt. While Garvey was preaching about the need for a physical return to Africa, Drew Ali attempted to psychically (re)discover his brethren’s roots while remaining in the United States. The UNIA and the MSTA, with their different approaches to empower African Americans, together set the stage for the largest, most influential Black religious movement to develop.

## **Peddling Prophecies**

In 1930, an enigmatic figure, most commonly known as W.D. Fard, began to preach a distinct Muslim message to inner-city Blacks in Detroit who were suffering through the Great Depression. His arrival was timely: Marcus Garvey had been deported in 1927, while Noble Drew Ali had been assassinated in 1929. Fard initially peddled ordinary items like raincoats and “exotic” items such as silk door-to-door. The foreignness of some of these items engendered a conversation with the poor African Americans he would eventually proselytize. According to one follower, Fard told the migrants that “the silks he carried were the same kind that our people used in their home country and that he had come from there. So we all asked him to tell us about our own country.”<sup>20</sup>

Despite its sensationalistic title, Erdmann Doane Beynon’s 1938 article “The Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants in Detroit” is a useful source for understanding the early teachings of Fard, especially because Beynon conducted several interviews with Fard’s followers. Members claimed that Fard “was born in Mecca, the son of wealthy parents of the tribe of the Koreish, the tribe from which Mohammed the Prophet sprang, and that he was closely related by blood to the dynasty of the Hashimide sheriffs of Mecca who became kings of the Hejaz.”<sup>21</sup> Beynon reports that most of Fard’s followers, representing the last wave of the Great Migration, were previously exposed to and influenced by the teachings of Marcus Garvey and Noble Drew Ali, albeit indirectly. A few of the early followers were former members of the MSTA, which likely made them amenable to Fard’s similar heritage claims. “The newer migrants,” according to Beynon, “entered a social milieu in which the atmosphere was filled with questions about the origin of their people. Long before their new prophet appeared among them they were wondering who they were and whence they had come.”<sup>22</sup> Moreover, some authors assert that in the early days Fard attracted new members by claiming that he embodied Noble Drew Ali’s reincarnated spirit.<sup>23</sup>

Fard used his purported Saudi heritage as a paradigm for his conceptualization of African-American ethnicity. He claimed, “The Black men of North America are not Negroes, but members of the lost tribe of Shebazz, stolen by traders from the Holy City of Mecca 379 yrs ago. . . . The original people must regain their religion, which is Islam, their language, which is Arabic, and their culture, which is astronomy and higher math-

ematics, especially calculus.”<sup>24</sup> Similar to Noble Drew Ali’s proclamation that African Americans are ethnically Asiatic, Fard also taught his followers that they were Asiatic people, but of a presumably fictitious tribe of nobles from Saudi Arabia.<sup>25</sup> While the MSTA situated their pre-slavery origins in Morocco (Africa), the proto-NOI sect believed that their people merely crossed Africa when kidnapped from Mecca (Asia). Despite Noble Drew Ali’s assertion that African Americans are “olive-skinned Asiatic people,” Fard used his followers’ Black skin as a feature to be esteemed, proclaiming that they are “Black Asiatics.” This focus on race pride was likely borrowed from Garveyism. In collecting the broken strands of Drew Ali’s escapist Asiatic religion and Garvey’s inspirational notions of Black uplift and self-determination, Fard began to weave together a powerful new vision.

Fard’s role quickly progressed from peddler to prophet as his congregation took shape. He founded the first University of Islam (actually a primary school) in Detroit in 1931. That same year, in the former UNIA assembly hall in Detroit, Fard spoke to a few hundred listeners about the tenets of Islam, the magnificent origins of the so-called Negro, and the path to paradise. One of the listeners was Elijah Poole, a migrant from Georgia who was a former corporal of the UNIA’s Chicago chapter and would later become Fard’s Supreme Minister.<sup>26</sup>

Soon after his conversion, Poole changed his name to Elijah Muhammad, replacing his “slave name” with a surname that identified him with his newfound origin.<sup>27</sup> Together, Fard and Elijah established a temple in Chicago and started to set up one in Milwaukee, but, in 1934, Fard disappeared. Despite the FBI’s attempts to locate him and testimonies by some members who claim that Fard was in continuous communication with Elijah Muhammad, the truth regarding Fard’s obscure origins, his mysterious arrival in Detroit, and his equally elusive disappearance will probably never be thoroughly understood. The movement became factionalized; Elijah Muhammad vied for the leadership with the claim that Fard was actually Allah in the flesh. He relocated his followers to Chicago and began to teach them that he was the prophet of Allah.<sup>28</sup> Guided by Fard’s vision and his own experience, Elijah Muhammad extrapolated elements from Drew Ali’s religious teaching and Garvey’s political philosophy, but ultimately declared that “both men failed to bring about the redemption of the race because they did not possess ‘the key’ and because the ‘time was not ripe.’”<sup>29</sup>

The “key” to which Elijah Muhammad refers is the revelation that all white men are devils. Though it was implied in Drew Ali’s teachings—he associated the white man with Satan—Fard explicitly claimed that the white man is the devil.<sup>30</sup> NOI theology centered on two fundamental parables (that were conveyed as truth): the stories of the so-called Negro’s Asiatic origin and of the devilish nature of the white man. According to NOI doctrine, over eight thousand years ago, a brilliant but malevolent geneticist of the Tribe of Shabazz named Yacub used his scientific knowledge to create the white man out of the original (Black) man by gradually mutating the latter’s genes. The history of the naturally weak and wicked white man, according to the NOI, only reaches back six thousand years, to the moment when the first white man was “grafted.” Little is known about the extent to which Fard explicitly contributed to the canonization of these narratives, especially since during the formative years (1930s to mid-1950s) teachings were mostly transmitted orally.<sup>31</sup>

## Bringing the Black Man’s Noble Asiatic History to Light

The appeal of the Nation of Islam was largely based on its discourses of identity and Black pride borne out of reclaiming and reshaping history. By viewing the NOI as a movement developing in the context of the Great Migration, Great Depression, headless

MSTA, and dismantled UNIA, we have shown how the NOI's peculiar genealogical myths enchanted thousands of poor African Americans. Aside from the borrowing and elaboration of some MSTA concepts, however, the question remains as to *whence* Fard and Elijah Muhammad acquired the particular concepts they preached.

The words of Malcolm X during his involvement with the Nation of Islam (1952–1964) conveyed the most articulate vision (and sometimes candid interpretation) of Elijah Muhammad's message. Therefore, Malcolm's speeches provide the best platform on which to examine the nature and origins of the message from that period.<sup>32</sup> Although there are few extant records of Malcolm's speeches and interviews from the early days of his ministry, the evidence that remains very clearly states his (and the NOI's) position on their heritage.

In the summer of 1960, Malcolm X sat down with Nat Hentoff of *The Reporter* to discuss the peculiar nature of the NOI, a sect that had been around for decades but had become known to the world only a year earlier.<sup>33</sup> Malcolm remarked that Black people lack knowledge about Africa and lamented the enduring stereotype of the uncivilized African. "Most so-called Negroes," said Malcolm, "know less about their cultural background than a native in deepest Africa. Many, in fact, still think of Africa—despite the growth of African states—as a continent of naked, flesh-eating barbarians. We teach [so-called Negroes] how rich their past is; we teach them there were Black men on earth before the whites, and that we are the chosen of Allah."<sup>34</sup> The juxtaposition of the latter two sentences creates the impression that the Nation of Islam teaches that the Black man originated in Africa. This sentiment appears to be a far cry from Fard's contention that the Tribe of Shabazz arrived from Mecca some four hundred years ago. In fact, in the overwhelming majority of public speeches Malcolm and other ministers give in this period, it is strongly stated that the Nation identifies with Africa. By examining speeches given inside the mosques to followers, the seeming contradiction of being both African and Asiatic is clarified.

According to FBI files, on June 21, 1957 Minister Malcolm X explained to followers and visitors to Harlem's Temple No. 7<sup>35</sup> that their origins lie in Asia, not Africa:

Who is the Original Man? The Honorable Elijah Muhammad has taught us the truth. It is the Asiatic Black Man. Why do we say the Asiatic Black Man? Why not the African Black Man or any other Black Man?

Before the white man knew of the planets, they [Black Men] had their true Arabic names but since the White Man has made his culture supreme the whole universe has been altered. Originally this entire planet (that is now called Earth) was called Asia. The first man on it was the Black Man. From him came the brown, red, yellow, and even the white man.<sup>36</sup>

The history of "our own kind," then, had presumably become more complicated and elaborate in the decades after Fard's disappearance. That Malcolm addressed the question as to why they are not African suggests that the NOI was distinguishing itself from competing Black Nationalist ideologies. Malcolm offered the most thorough description of the Asiatic Black Man in his aptly titled 1962 speech, "Black Man's History," delivered one year before Elijah Muhammad silenced him.

Fifty thousand years ago . . . [a] scientist named Shabazz took his family and wandered down into the jungles of Africa. Prior to that time no one lived in the jungles. Our people were soft; they were black but they were soft and delicate, fine. They had straight hair. Right here on this Earth you find some of them look like that today. They are black as night, but their hair is like silk, and originally *all* our people had

that kind of hair. But this scientist took his family down into the jungles of Africa, and living in the open, living a jungle life, eating all kinds of food had an effect on the appearance of our people. Actually living in the rough climate, our hair became stiff, like it is now. We undertook new features that we have now.<sup>37</sup>

Malcolm's teaching differs significantly from that of Fard's, which implied that the Tribe of Shabazz merely crossed over Africa from Mecca en route to the United States 379 years ago. In this altered myth of their lineage, the Tribe of Shabazz settled in Africa long enough to acquire "African" features. Moreover, Malcolm explained that the original man had existed on planet Asia for sixty-six trillion years and migrated to Africa fifty thousand years ago.<sup>38</sup> This dramatic revision may have reflected a consequence of the drastic increase in NOI membership and notoriety among the Black masses: members may have sought a precise creation story, one that is (more) compatible with the fact that slaves were taken from Africa, not Asia. The story, at times, was even more confusing for new converts; the "true knowledge," explained to Malcolm in prison through letters written by his siblings, was that "Original Man was black, in the continent called Africa where the human race had emerged on the planet Earth."<sup>39</sup>

The most flagrant contradiction in NOI theology, it seems, is that the teachings simultaneously embrace and repel biblical narratives. On the one hand, Elijah and Malcolm often drew from the Bible to illustrate the African-American experience. For example, in the last speech Malcolm gave as Elijah Muhammad's chief spokesman, he explained that

Moses' message to the slave master [Pharaoh] was simple and clear: "Let my people go. . . . Let them no longer be *segregated* by you; stop trying to deceive them with false promises of *integration* with you; let them *separate* themselves from you. . . ." Moses was trying to restore unto his people their own lost culture, their lost identity, their lost racial dignity . . . the same as The Honorable Elijah Muhammad is trying to do among the twenty-two million "Negro" slaves here in this modern House of Bondage today.<sup>40</sup>

On the other hand, in both early NOI doctrine and in Malcolm's other speeches, it is revealed that "Moses never went down into Egypt. Moses went into the caves of Europe and civilized the white man."<sup>41</sup> To the descendents of Shabazz, the Bible is the devil's history. Thus, Adam was the first white man grafted by Yacub's gang. Malcolm explains this belief in his "Black Man's History" speech:

The Honorable Elijah Muhammad teaches us that that man, Adam, was a white man; that before Adam was made the black man was already there. The white man will even tell you that, because *he* refers to Adam as the first one. He refers to the Adamites as those who came from that first one. He refers to the pre-Adamites as those who were here before Adam. . . . And he always refers to these people as "aborigines," which means what? BLACK FOLK!!!<sup>42</sup>

Benjamin 2X explains that Malcolm used biblical narratives as metaphors for Black experience because his followers likely could relate to those stories. "If black people have only one book to their name," Benjamin asserts, "chances are that book will be the Bible, and most of them have at least a nodding acquaintance with portions of it. Much of the time Malcolm would use familiar portions of the Bible to illustrate his point, such as his comparing Moses and the slaves in ancient Egypt to our situation here in present-day America."<sup>43</sup> The notion that Black people are pre-Adamite beings reflects the awareness of an intellectual debate from the Enlightenment period engendered by the trans-Atlantic slave trade, concerning the nature of humanity.<sup>44</sup> The theological explanation for the cre-



ation of humankind was insufficient for these European “men of reason.” One school of thought, polygenism, or the theory of a separate creation of the races, held that the Negroid race was sub-human (and therefore pre-Adamite), as compared to their Caucasian counterpart. For, as Edith Sanders points out, “the Western world, which was growing increasingly rich on the institution of slavery, grew increasingly reluctant to look at the Negro slave and see him as a brother under the skin.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, the Nation of Islam’s beliefs concerning the disparate genealogies of the races was a bitter reversal of this race theory that had authorized and justified slavery.

## Asian Invasion

What of Malcolm’s peculiar claim that Shabazz wanted to toughen his people by leading his straight-haired tribe into the jungles of Africa? It is worth noting that in the *Autobiography*’s lengthy passage denouncing the “self-defacing conk,” Malcolm/Haley does not explain this aspect of the NOI’s genealogy.<sup>46</sup> Beynon provides some insight into this myth, by merely reporting on some of the books Fard used as study guides—and likely passed on to Elijah Muhammad—during the formative years of the movement. Along with texts on Freemasonry and the Jehovah’s Witnesses (unfortunately, Beynon does not specify which ones), in meetings Fard read excerpts from two very popular history books: Breasted’s *Conquest of Civilization* (1926) and Van Loon’s *Story of Mankind* (1922).<sup>47</sup> Van Loon’s book was intended for children; Breasted’s work was originally published in 1916 as the standard textbook for young people—so widely read, in fact, that scholars adopted the term “Fertile Crescent” from it.<sup>48</sup> While *The Conquest of Civilization* focuses on pre-history to ancient Roman times, *The Story of Mankind* gives a brief overview of human history, from “Our Earliest Ancestors” to “The Great War” (World War I). It is important to recognize that these books described a selective history of *Western* civilization, ignoring Africa entirely, save Egypt. Both authors concede that while peoples of “the Orient” (comprising Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, Persia, and the Hebrews) were building nations and developing high civilization, Europeans of the Late Stone Age were struggling with their primitive stone tools in the dark. Breasted, an Egyptologist, wrote, “It was the culmination of that long commingling of ancient Oriental civilizations gathering from Egypt and Asia and forming that Egypto-Asiatic culture nucleus which eventually transformed the life of once savage and barbarous Europe.”<sup>49</sup> This historical “fact” was sifted from these (and probably other similar) books, only to be exploited and incorporated into the Nation’s version of history. “When the black princes of Asia and Africa were wearing silks and plotting the stars,” Minister Louis X asserted, “the white man was crawling around on his all-fours in the caves of Europe. The reason why the white man keeps dogs in the house today, and sleeps with them and rides with them about in cars is that he slept with the dogs in the caves of Europe and he has never broken the habit.”<sup>50</sup>

However, according to Breasted, because Africans were isolated from “any effective intrusion” by the “Great White Race,” “the negro and negroid peoples remained without any influence on the development of early civilization.”<sup>51</sup> As for the Egyptians, they belonged to a sub-group of the “Great White Race,” “notwithstanding their tanned skins.”<sup>52</sup> While there is some suggestion by Van Loon that the Egyptians were part African, his observations are similar to Breasted’s:

The fame of the Valley of the Nile must have spread at an early date. From the interior of Africa and from the desert of Arabia and from the western part of Asia people had flocked to Egypt to claim their share of the rich farms. Together these invaders

had formed a new race which called itself ‘Remi’ or ‘the Men,’ just as we often call the Hebrews ‘the Chosen People.’<sup>53</sup>

How is it that this idea of an Asian invasion of Africa, civilizing in its wake, came to be? Why did Van Loon and Breasted consider ancient Egypt to be an “Oriental civilization”? Furthermore, did the Nation of Islam merely absorb and perpetuate this blatantly racist view of Africa? Although Beynon reports that Fard intended the assigned texts to be understood “symbolically,” he did use them to establish “proofs about themselves.”<sup>54</sup> Since Elijah Muhammad and his followers believed that Fard was Allah incarnate, it is reasonable to assume that Elijah continued to use these texts after Fard’s disappearance. Moreover, Turner reminds us that Elijah Muhammad, Marcus Garvey, and Noble Drew Ali’s agendas reflected the “old civilizationist ideas of the late nineteenth-century Pan-Africanists,” such as Edward Wilmot Blyden, who believed that American Blacks needed to “lift the veil of darkness” and civilize Africa.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, Elijah Muhammad later wrote in *The Fall of America*:

I have been preaching to the Black Man in America that we should accept our own; and instead of the Black man going to the decent side of his own, he goes back seeking traditional Africa, and the way they did in jungle life and the way you see in some parts of uncivilized Africa today. . . . Black Brother and Black Sister, wearing savage dress and hair-styles will not get you the love of Africa. The dignified people of Africa are either Muslim or educated Christians.<sup>56</sup>

This vague statement implies that the tribe of Shabazz does not encompass all Black people; “traditional” Africans are excluded and shunned. It also suggests that the jungles were inhabited when the tribe reached Africa. Indeed, what Elijah Muhammad describes in the Shabazz narrative is the migratory invasion of the Black Asiatic tribe into the “dark continent.”

## The Pervasive Myth of the Black Caucasoid

In *Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms*, Wilson Jeremiah Moses compares the Black Jews and the Nation of Islam, and the efforts of Pan-Africanism, Pan-Islamism, and Zionism in general. He rightly contends that Black Jews and Muslims have responded in similar ways to a racist environment that thwarted their aspirations. Where they differ, Moses argues, is in the former group’s insistence that African culture is Judaic, in “contempt” of “indigenous African culture”—thereby “leav[ing] them with strange bedfellows.”<sup>57</sup> He traces the beliefs of the Ethiopian Hebrew Nation and that of other similar Jewish groups to what is now known as the “Hamitic Hypothesis,” a theory Moses attributes to the anthropologist C.G. Seligman,<sup>58</sup> which holds that any and every vestige of civilization on the African continent must have been the work of Asian or European settlers (Hamites), not of the people indigenous to Africa. The Ethiopian Hebrew Nation, argues Moses, conflated the Semites with the Hamites, allegedly a racial and ethnic sub-classification of the Caucasian race. The truth is, however, that the Black Jews and the Nation of Islam have more in common than Moses realized.

The Hamitic Hypothesis was amplified but not created by Seligman; the history of its use is much more complex and expansive than Moses’ research suggested. Recent research shows that the Hamitic Hypothesis influenced historical, philosophical, anthropological, and archaeological study throughout Africa from the late eighteenth century to the modern day.<sup>59</sup> In Edith Sanders’ 1969 article entitled “The Hamitic Hypothesis: Its

Origin and Functions in Time Perspective,” she carefully traces the racialization of Ham to the sixth century CE.

Sanders postulates that there were three different phases of the Hamitic myth. The original, biblical myth from the book of Genesis held that Noah had three sons: Shem, Japhet, and Ham. Noah cursed Ham’s son, Canaan, because Ham did not avert his eyes in shame from his drunken, naked father. The Bible does not describe Ham or his progeny as Black; the curse on Canaan only promised that “a servant of servants shall he be.” The assertion that Ham was Black emerged in the second manifestation of the Hamitic myth, “out of a need of the Israelites to rationalize their subjugation of Canaan.”<sup>60</sup> This revision was concretized in the Babylonian Talmud of the sixth century CE.

Napoleon’s 1798 invasion of Egypt inspired the third version of this hypothesis. The discovery of the ancient Egyptian civilization in Africa, then viewed as the mother of Western civilization, was obviously problematic in light of slavery. Members of Napoleon’s expedition described both the depiction of ancient Egyptians on wall paintings and the physical features of the living Egyptians as Negroid.<sup>61</sup> The problem was this: “If the Negro was the descendent of Ham, and Ham was cursed, how could he be the creator of a great civilization?”<sup>62</sup> Enlightenment intellectuals deduced that Canaan, son of Ham, was cursed, but Ham and his other sons were not. While the Canaanites had been pre-ordained for slavery, Ham and his other sons were conveniently deemed Black but not Negroid, but rather, Caucasians under a Black skin.<sup>63</sup> Subsequent discoveries of civilized African nations in the late nineteenth century compelled explorers to associate every remnant of high civilization and cultural achievement to this mythical Hamitic race. “The confusion surrounding the ‘Hamite,’” Sanders argues, “was steadily compounded as the terms of reference became increasingly overlapping and vague. The racial classification of ‘Hamites’ encompassed a great variety of types from fair-skinned, blonde, blue-eyed (Berbers) to black (Ethiopians).”<sup>64</sup>

Sander’s epistemological study explains the classification of ancient Egypt as an “Oriental civilization.” Breasted’s “Egypto-Asiatic culture nucleus” was another way of attributing African achievement to the well-worn theory of the migratory Hamites. It is hardly surprising that Noble Drew Ali and Elijah Muhammad developed their genealogies in the manner and using the rhetoric that they did—this was the only material on Africa with which they had to work. Similar to teaching that the polygenists were correct (Black people are pre-Adamite—and proud!), the NOI’s genealogical myth merely represented the inverse of the Hamitic Hypothesis: a *Black* Asiatic invasion of Africa. Rather than dispute the veracity of the tenuous, faith-based claims put forth by historians and anthropologists, Drew Ali, Fard, and Muhammad manipulated European historiographies of Africa to forge a positive, “legitimate” history of Black people in America.

## Bringing Malcolm X’s Proud African History to the Surface

Systematically delineating and assessing the winding path of comments regarding Malcolm X’s self-identification would be a monumental task that far exceeds the scope and space for this essay, since Malcolm’s numerous remarks on his heritage often varied depending on the context of the speech or discussion. Several relationships and moments in his life that could inform that type of inquiry immediately come to mind (and could stand alone as essays unto themselves): analyzing Malcolm’s alliances with other Black Nationalists in Harlem, especially Elder Michaux; investigating personal correspondence dating to the period when his sister and confidante Ella renounced the divinity of Fard; and tracking Malcolm’s close relationships with Elijah’s Sunni-leaning sons Wallace and Akbar Muhammad. Certainly, the cache of original documents that Malcolm’s six daughters

have lent to the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem—but, alas, have not yet released as of this writing—would likely be instrumental in this undertaking. While this essay aims to develop a hypothesis regarding the impetus for Malcolm’s shifting identities, I am by no means attempting to present a meticulous analysis of the evolution of his thought. Rather, my objective is to illustrate the likely origins of the Nation’s genealogical myth and use that to elucidate some of Malcolm X’s more cryptic and vitriolic statements regarding Elijah Muhammad’s teachings from late 1964 until his death.

Whether Malcolm X ever believed in the NOI’s genealogy or whether he promoted it only as a propagandistic device, belief is not the issue. Identifying with a particular movement, ethnicity, or group does not necessitate belief. Teaching and promoting these genealogies is, for the purpose of this study, the equivalent of identifying with them. While scholars such as Louis DeCaro have argued that in the 1950s Malcolm was already using more ambiguous and inclusive phrases such as the “Dark World” to simultaneously embrace African and Asiatic identities, his promotion of unity among all people of color does not preclude a personal identification as Asiatic.<sup>65</sup> Malcolm declared his “nationality” most emphatically in his 1962 “Black Man’s History” speech to fellow Muslims, but he also did not hesitate to divulge an abbreviated, diluted version of this history to the public. For example, in the fall of 1963 Malcolm gave a speech entitled “The Old Negro and the New Negro” to a mixed college audience at the University of Pennsylvania. In the question and answer period, Malcolm stated that “the entire earth was once known as Asia and all of the people on it at that time were Asiatic. . . . On my draft card it says Asiatic. And anything that anybody puts in front of me that wants to know what is my race or my nationality, any Muslim will put down Asiatic and that ends it.”<sup>66</sup> This shows that Malcolm continued to tout the Tribe of Shabazz narrative in the last year of his ministry for the Nation of Islam, however it would be the last time (to my knowledge) that he would publicly comment on being of Asiatic origin.

Moreover, there is no indication that after leaving the NOI Malcolm initially sought to subvert the Black Muslim dogma of separation and Black supremacy with his new organization. During the press conference on March 12, 1964 at which he announced his defection from the Nation of Islam and the founding of the Muslim Mosque, Incorporated (MMI), Malcolm declared, “I am and always will be a Muslim. My religion is Islam. I still believe that Mr. Muhammad’s analysis of the problem is the most realistic, and that his solution is the best one. This means that I too believe the best solution is complete separation, with our people going back home, to our own African homeland.”<sup>67</sup> Indeed, Malcolm originally envisioned the MMI as a more activist (however unaffiliated) branch of the NOI, where he would still teach the tenets of the NOI faith.<sup>68</sup>

While the *Autobiography* may have overemphasized the dramatic changes in Malcolm’s religious beliefs as a result of his conversion to Sunni Islam in April 1964, it should be noted that Malcolm did not publicly criticize the tenets of the Nation of Islam upon his return to the United States—that is, until he was prodded with threats and slandered in public. By June 1964, when Malcolm X announced the formation of his secular, pan-Africanist political group, the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), he was openly criticizing Elijah Muhammad’s character in the press.<sup>69</sup> Alex Haley reports that after returning from his second trip to Africa in late November 1964, Malcolm treated the subject of Muhammad’s teachings with increasingly “bitter accusations,” more “than he ever had.”<sup>70</sup> While Haley attributes this “sudden . . . spate of attacks” to a September court decision to evict Malcolm and his family from their East Elmhurst home, it is likely that his virulent criticism of Elijah Muhammad was in response to the culmination of problems he had with Muhammad’s organization. The initial set of criticisms was centered on the Nation’s disinclination to activate its ranks in response to injustices, their mishandling of funds, and Muhammad’s infidelities.<sup>71</sup> The presence of the Nation’s “en-



forcers” (strongmen who were commissioned to assault Malcolm and threaten his family) coupled with the relentlessly negative coverage of him in *Muhammad Speaks* undoubtedly exacerbated the resentment Malcolm felt towards his former spiritual leader.<sup>72</sup> However, interpreting Malcolm’s public denouncements of Elijah Muhammad and the NOI as mere knee-jerk reactions to this hostile atmosphere overlooks the profound insights embedded in his criticisms.

## Message to the Afro-American

Beginning in mid-December 1964, Malcolm X adopted a radically different argument as part of his political repertoire. Before the Harvard Law School Forum on December 16, Malcolm said the following:

Many people will tell you that the black man in this country doesn’t identify with Africa. Before 1959, many Negroes didn’t. But before 1959, the image of Africa was created by an enemy of Africa, because Africans weren’t in a position to create and to project their own images. The image was created by the imperial powers of Europe. Europeans created and popularized the image of Africa as a jungle, a wild place where people were cannibals, naked and savage in a countryside overrun with dangerous animals. Such an image of the Africans was so hateful to Afro-Americans that they refused to identify with Africa. We did not realize that in hating Africa and the Africans we were hating ourselves. . . . We Negroes hated . . . the African nose, the shape of our lips, the color of our skin, the texture of our hair . . . it was not an image created by African or by Afro-Americans, but by an enemy.<sup>73</sup>

The notion that European colonialists were responsible for circulating negative propaganda about Africans would be expressed in a very similar manner and tone in most of the speeches Malcolm gave from December until his death on February 21, 1965.<sup>74</sup> At first glance, it does not appear that his argument differs significantly from what he was describing in the *Reporter* interview of 1960, discussed above. In both instances, Malcolm was rejecting stereotypes about Africa. Malcolm expounds on his views in his January 1965 speech “On Afro-American History,” revealing a fundamentally revised understanding of history. Malcolm said,

They say mankind is divided up into three categories—Mongoloid, Caucasoid, and Negroid. . . . And all black people aren’t Negroid—they’ve got some jet black ones that they classify as Caucasoid. But if you’ll study very closely, all the black ones that they classify as Caucasoid are those that still have great civilizations, or still have the remains of what was once a great civilization. The only ones that they classify as Negroid, are those that they find no evidence that they were ever civilized; then they call them Negroid. But they can’t afford to let any black-skinned people who have evidence that they formally occupied a high seat in civilization, they can’t afford to let them be called Negroid, so they take them on into the Caucasoid classification.<sup>75</sup>

His argument appears to have evolved from his NOI-sanctioned comments on the etymology of the term “Negro” and the consequent mental enslavement suffered by African Americans who choose to identify with the term. In those earlier statements, Malcolm deduced that the white man’s system of classification was flawed and inconsistent: “If Frenchmen are of France and Germans are of Germany, where is ‘Negroland’? I’ll tell you: it’s in the mind of the white man! . . . You don’t call Minnie Minoso a “Negro,” and he’s blacker than I am. You call him a Cuban! . . .”<sup>76</sup> The important shift lies in his broadening of the focus group—from analyzing the uniqueness of the so-called Ameri-

can Negro's problem ("Nkrumah is an African—a Ghanaian—you don't call him a 'Negro'")<sup>77</sup> to seeing how colonialist typologies have oppressed people of color worldwide. He continues:

And actually, Caucasoid, Mongoloid, and Negroid—there's no such thing. These are so-called anthropological terms that were put together by anthropologists who were nothing but agents of the colonial powers, and they were purposely given such scientific positions in order that they could come up with definitions that would justify the European domination over the Africans and the Asians. So immediately they invented classifications that would automatically demote these people or put them on a lesser level. All of the Caucasoids are on a high level, the Negroids are kept at a low level. This is just plain trickery that their scientists engage in in order to keep you and me thinking that we never were anything, and therefore he's doing us a favor as he lets us step upward or forward in his particular society or civilization.<sup>78</sup>

Malcolm's argument presents a more mature and informed version of the sentiments implied while on *hajj* in April 1964, namely that race is a social construction—not a scientific fact. During his pilgrimage to Mecca, Malcolm had his Muslim Mosque, Inc. issue a press release which read (in part): "Throughout my travels in the Muslim World, I have met, talked to, and even eaten with people who would have been considered 'white' in America, but the religion of Islam in their hearts has removed the 'white' from their minds."<sup>79</sup> It is important to recognize that Malcolm's views regarding the veracity of race as a scientific truth had by this point permeated both his religious and political agendas. Indeed, Malcolm's experiences after leaving the Nation enabled him to argue what appears to be the antithesis of Elijah Muhammad's program, that "we [black people] were scientifically produced by the white man."<sup>80</sup> Given his astute statements regarding the colonialist discourse on Africans and the spurious taxonomies authored by anthropologists it is reasonable to deduce that Malcolm had recently become familiar with the deceptions inherent in the Hamitic Hypothesis.

At least twice in February 1965 Malcolm attributed the shift in his views to conversations he had while on his second, longer trip to Africa the previous year, from July through November 1964. "During my conversations with these men [presidents of several countries], and other Africans on that continent, there was much information exchanged that definitely broadened my understanding and, I feel, broadened my scope."<sup>81</sup> Malcolm's shrewd observations regarding the colonialist hand in African historiography was undoubtedly influenced by the contemporaneous African nationalist effort to reconstruct their own histories. The extent to which Malcolm engaged with African intellectuals directly involved in the re-writing of history will likely become known when the diaries of his trips are released to the public.<sup>82</sup>

Juxtaposing Malcolm's perspective on historiography circa February 1965 with some of the passing comments made about Elijah Muhammad's teachings from this period suggests very strongly that the criticism was geared towards Muhammad as much as the European writers of African history, albeit in a far subtler manner. On two occasions in late February, Malcolm was speaking "off the cuff" about his break with the NOI. On the first occasion, Malcolm was responding to questions after a speech at an OAAU rally held in the Audubon Ballroom on February 15. He remarked, "You cannot read anything that Elijah Muhammad has ever written that's pro-African. I defy you to find one word in his direct writings that's pro-African. You can't find it."<sup>83</sup> Malcolm elaborated on this assertion during a panel discussion on WINS Radio in New York, three days later:

STAN BERNARD (moderator): Let me ask you this, Malcolm. You at one time espoused complete separation of the races.

MALCOLM X: I must say this concerning what Elijah Muhammad said about separation. He didn't espouse separation. What he said was this: that the government should—if the government can't give complete equality right now, then the government should permit Black people to go back to Africa—He didn't ever say back to Africa. Elijah Muhammad has never made one statement that's pro-African. And he has never, in any of his speeches, written or oral, said anything to his followers about Africa.

BERNARD: What about a Black state in the United States?

MALCOLM X: He was as anti-African as he was anti-white.

BERNARD: Did you say a Black state in the United States?

MALCOLM X: No. So what he said was, "We should go back to our own." And he phrased it like that, because if he spelled it out, he would have to point to some geographic area, and he would have to have the consent of the people in that geographic area, which he knew he couldn't get. . . .<sup>84</sup>

Malcolm's revised understanding of history was not exclusively a recognition and condemnation of the mechanisms of colonialism. Malcolm realized that the Nation of Islam's genealogical myth deprived members of the truth about their African origin. Noble Drew Ali and Elijah Muhammad internalized racism to the extent that despite attempting to subvert racist ideology, they appropriated it. Malcolm X sought to revolutionize Black historiographies, rather than merely manipulate the European versions already in place. His comments concerning Elijah Muhammad's treatment of Africa in his teachings show that in his last months Malcolm was also critiquing the Black Nationalist tradition from which he sprang.

## Notes

1. Malcolm X, "Black Man's History," in Imam Benjamin Karim, ed., *The End of White World Supremacy* (New York: Seaver Books, 1971), p. 26.

2. Ibid., pp. 11, 13.

3. See Alan Dershowitz's comment in Malcolm X, Archie Epps, ed., *The Speeches of Malcolm X at Harvard* (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1968), p. 161.

4. Malcolm claimed that "the teachings of Mr. Muhammad stressed how history had been 'whitened'—when white men had written history books, the black man simply had been left out. Mr. Muhammad couldn't have said anything that would have struck me much harder." Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), p. 201.

5. Richard Brent Turner's *Islam in the African-American Experience* (Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1997) is one exception and I rely heavily on his important work throughout this essay. However, Turner's work covers the variety of Muslim religious identities that crop up throughout African-American history, sparing relatively little time on Malcolm's own ideas about his ancestors.

6. Turner, *Islam*, pp. 73, 75.

7. Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer, *African-American Religion in the Twentieth Century: Varieties of Protest and Accommodation* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), p. 51.

8. Arthur Fauset, *Black Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults in the Urban North* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), pp. 52–68 for Father Divine, pp. 31–41 for the Church of God.

9. Ibid., pp. 107–108. In using the term "cult," Fauset was simply referring to the size of the sect and the strength and unusual charisma of the leader.

10. This, of course, was not the first time the idea of returning to Africa was publicly expressed—church leaders in the mid-nineteenth century first advocated and acted on this idea. See Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans*, 3rd edition (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998), pp. 125–162. For a comprehensive look at the man behind the move-

ment, see E. David Cronon's biography, *Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

11. Erdmann Doane Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants in Detroit," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 43, Issue 6 (May 1938): 898; and E.U. Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for An Identity in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 58.

12. Philip Potter, "The Religious Thought of Marcus Garvey," in Rupert Lewis and Patrick Bryan, eds., *Garvey: His Work and Impact* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1991), pp. 161–162.

13. Arnold Hughes, "Africa and the Garvey Movement in the Interwar Years," in Rupert Lewis and Maureen Warner-Lewis, eds., *Garvey: Africa, Europe, and the Americas* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1994), p. 102.

14. According to Turner, *The Aquarian Gospels of Jesus Christ* is "an occult version of the New Testament" and *Unto Thee I Grant* was published by the Rosicrucians, a Masonic order which is preoccupied with Egyptian mysticism. Turner, *Islam*, pp. 93–94. Curiously, the only white, mainstream Masonic lodge that accepted Black members in the early twentieth century was the Alpha Lodge No. 116, located in New Jersey. While it is possible that Drew Ali was aware of the Alpha Lodge's mixed membership, it is doubtful that he had direct connections to this lodge. See William J. Whalen, *Christianity and American Freemasonry* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), p. 29.

15. Fauset, *Black Gods*, p. 41; Turner, *Islam*, pp. 92–93, 96.

16. Fauset, *Black Gods*, p. 47.

17. Turner, *Islam*, p. 93.

18. Fauset, *Black Gods*, p. 47. Associating Black people in America with North Africans (and other people of color who tend to be light-complexioned) perhaps reflects the politics of color and its relationship to status—ideas that were pervasive in this period. For example, Malcolm X remarks on the favoritism his father showed him (in the late 1920s) and asserts that it was due to him being the lightest child. See *Autobiography*, pp. 5, 7.

19. Jose V. Pimienta-Bey, *Some "Myths" of the Moorish Science Temple: An Afrocentric Historical Analysis*, doctoral dissertation submitted to the Temple University Graduate Board (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI, 1995), p. 243.

20. Sister Denke Majied, one of Fard's early followers. Quoted in Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult," p. 895.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 897.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 898–899.

23. See Clifton E. Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Transition from Separatism to Islam 1930–1980* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1984), p. 51; Karl Evanzz, *The Messenger: The Rise and Fall of Elijah Muhammad* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), p. 68.

24. Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult," p. 900. Beynon uses the spelling "Shebazz;" in this essay I will write "Shabazz" because this is the spelling used in NOI literature.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 906.

26. Turner, *Islam*, p. 154.

27. Fard had initially named Poole "Karriem," but later upgraded it to "Muhammad." See C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 3rd edition (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1994), p. 15. Other members would later substitute an "X" for their slave names. The "X" signified an unknown family lineage, but it also, perhaps, represented Fard's teaching about their lost culture, which included "higher mathematics." For a thorough description of the process of discarding slave names, see Lincoln, pp. 105–106.

28. Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult," p. 907.

29. Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism*, p. 63.

30. Marsh, *From Black Muslims*, p. 56.

31. Beynon cites two key "textbooks" authored by Fard: *Teaching for the Lost Found Nation of Islam in a Mathematical Way* and *Secret Ritual of the Nation of Islam*. The Bible was used in the early period, presumably before Fard's texts were composed. *Teaching . . . in a Mathematical Way* was written in code, requiring Fard's interpretation. At the time of Beynon's writing (1939), few copies of *Secret Ritual* existed; the knowledge was transmitted orally. See Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult," pp. 895, 898 and Lincoln, *The Black Muslims*, p. 14.

32. Elijah Muhammad's *Message to the Black Man in America* (Chicago: Muhammad Mosque of Islam No. 2, 1965) provides the most comprehensive description of the histories of whites and the original people, but this study concerns the NOI's beliefs during Malcolm's lifetime (1925–1965).

33. In July 1959, "The Hate That Hate Produced," an inflammatory news report on the Nation of Islam, aired in five installments on WTNA-TV in New York. Malcolm X, *Autobiography*, pp. 271, 273–276.

34. Nat Hentoff, "Elijah in the Wilderness," *The Reporter*, Vol. 23 (August 4, 1960): 39–40.

35. From late 1959 to early 1960, Elijah Muhammad and a few of his sons visited Asia and Africa. There they discovered that Muslims in the East call their places of worship "mosques" (when speaking English). Consequently, in early 1960, Elijah Muhammad ordered the Nation's ministers to rename their temples



"mosques." Hence I will retain the term "temple" when referring to NOI places of worship prior to 1960. See Evanzz, *The Messenger*, p. 214.

36. FBI Teletype, Malcolm X FBI File, July 11, 1957. Activities of Little in New York, New York on June 21, 1957.

37. Malcolm X, "Black Man's History," p. 48 (original emphasis). Elijah Muhammad offered an abbreviated version of the story at a 1960 Chicago convention. See Bontemps and Conroy, *Anyplace*, p. 226.

38. Malcolm X, "Black Man's History," pp. 44–49.

39. Malcolm X, *Autobiography*, p. 187. Perhaps his siblings were guided more by the Garveyite elements in Nation of Islam doctrine, since this type of thinking was central to how they were raised. See Ted Vincent, "The Garveyite Parents of Malcolm X," *The Black Scholar* (March/April 1989): 10–13.

40. Malcolm X, "God's Judgment of White America" in Imam Benjamin Karim, ed., *The End of White World Supremacy* (New York: Seaver Books, 1971), pp. 126–127 (original emphasis). This was a common theme for Malcolm throughout his tenure with the Nation of Islam. For example, the FBI cites a speech at a meeting of the Chicago Temple in 1955 or 1956, "He [informant] advised that Little cited the ordeals encountered by the children of Israel when they were held captive by the Egyptians in biblical times and likened this to the condition of the Negro in America today." FBI Teletype, Malcolm X FBI File, April 23, 1957, "Activities of Little in Chicago, Illinois," p. 16.

41. Malcolm X, "Black Man's History," p. 64.

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 42–43.

43. Imam Benjamin Karim, "Introduction," in Imam Benjamin Karim, ed., *The End of White World Supremacy* (New York: Seaver Books, 1971), pp. 16–17. Malcolm himself remarked on his pedagogical style, "I had learned early one important thing, and that was to always teach in terms that the people could understand." Malcolm X, *Autobiography*, p. 254.

44. See, for example, Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 81–82.

45. Edith R. Sanders, "The Hamitic Hypothesis: Its Origin and Functions in Time Perspective," *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 10, no. 4 (1969): 524.

46. Given Malcolm's emphasis on hair politics while preaching for the NOI, it is curious that he did not reconcile this inconsistency in any of his letters or speeches. See Malcolm X, *Autobiography*, pp. 62–65.

47. Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult," p. 900. James Henry Breasted, *The Conquest of Civilization* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1926). Hendrik Van Loon, *The Story of Mankind* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1922).

48. Breasted, *Conquest*, p. 117.

49. *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

50. Lincoln, *Black Muslims*, pp. 114–115. Minister Louis X later took the name Louis Farrakhan.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 113. Note that Breasted wrote, "Great White Race" in capitals and "Negro" and "Negroid" in lower-case letters.

52. *Ibid.*

53. Van Loon, *Story of Mankind*, p. 22.

54. Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult," p. 900.

55. Turner, *Islam*, pp. 53, 93, 162.

56. Elijah Muhammad, *The Fall of America* (Chicago: Muhammad's Temple of Islam No. 2, 1973), p. 150.

57. Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms: Social and Literary Manipulations of a Religious Myth* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1982), pp. 183–184, 189.

58. Moses, *Black Messiahs*, p. 189. Seligman's major text is *Races of Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930).

59. For a summary of the effects of the Hamitic Hypothesis on Black theology in nineteenth-century America, see Wilmore, *Black Religion*, pp. 145–147. For the influence of the Hamitic Hypothesis on the Hutus and Tutsis, see Mamdani, *When Victims*, pp. 79–87. For work on Nigeria, see Philip S. Zachernuk, "Of Origins and Colonial Order: Southern Nigerian Historians and the 'Hamitic Hypothesis' c. 1870–1970," *Journal of African History*, Vol. 35 (1994): 427–455. For the role of the Hamitic Hypothesis in justifying slavery, see Robin Blackburn, "The Old World Background to European Colonial Slavery," *William and Mary Quarterly* (3rd Ser), Vol. 54, no. 1 (January 1997): 90–97 and Benjamin Braude, "The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods," *William and Mary Quarterly* (3rd Ser), Vol. 54, no. 1 (January 1997), 103–142. For the role of the Hamitic Hypothesis in African historiography, see Joseph C. Miller, "History and Africa/Africa and History," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 104, Issue 1 (February 1999): 1–32. For the use of the Hamitic Hypothesis in interpreting the ruins at Great Zimbabwe, see Martin Hall, "The Legend of the Lost City: Or, the Man with Golden Balls," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (June 1995): 179–199.

60. Sanders, "Hamitic Hypothesis," p. 522.

61. Mamdani, *When Victims*, p. 82.
62. Sanders, "Hamitic Hypothesis," p. 526.
63. Mamdani, *When Victims*, pp. 82–83.
64. Sanders, "Hamitic Hypothesis," p. 529.
65. DeCaro, *On the Side of My People: A Religious Life of Malcolm X* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), p. 122.
66. Malcolm X, "The Old Negro and the New Negro," Imam Benjamin Karim, ed., *The End of White World Supremacy* (New York: Seaver Books, 1971), p. 106.
67. Malcolm X, "A Declaration of Independence," George Breitman, ed., *Malcolm X Speaks* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), p. 20. The idea of going back to Africa does not necessarily contradict the Shabazz narrative, since the Tribe of Shabazz presumably called it home for the 50,000 years prior to their enslavement.
68. See M.S. Handler, "Malcolm X Splits with Muhammad," *New York Times*, March 9, 1964, p. 1; "Malcolm's Brand X," *Newsweek*, March 23, 1964, p. 32.
69. "Malcolm X Flees For Life: Muslim Factions at War," *New York Amsterdam News*, June 20, 1964, pp. 1–2.
70. Malcolm X, *Autobiography*, p. 484.
71. In his eviction trial appearance, before dozens of Elijah Muhammad's followers, Malcolm accused Muhammad of "fathering almost a dozen illegitimate children." See "Malcolm X Flees For His Life," *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 11, 1964, p. 4.
72. See "Malcolm X Flees For Life: Muslim Factions at War," *New York Amsterdam News*, June 20, 1964.
73. Malcolm X, *The Speeches . . . at Harvard*, pp. 167–168.
74. See "The Oppressed Masses of the World Cry Out for Action Against the Common Oppressor," in Steve Clark, ed., *February 1965: The Final Speeches* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1992), p. 53; "Educate Our People in Politics," in *February 1965*, p. 94; "Not Just an American Problem," in *February 1965*, pp. 157, 161; and "A Global Rebellion of the Oppressed Against the Oppressor," in *February 1965*, p. 178.
75. Malcolm X, George Breitman, ed., *Malcolm X On Afro-American History* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1967), pp. 17–18.
76. Malcolm X at the Boston University Human Relations Center, February 15, 1960. Lincoln, *Black Muslims*, pp. 64–65. Minnie Minoso is the baseball legend who broke Chicago's "color barrier" when he signed with the White Sox in 1951.
77. *Ibid.*
78. Malcolm X, *On Afro-American History*, pp. 17–18.
79. This letter was published internationally. See, e.g., "An Open letter from Malcolm X," *Uganda Argus* (Kampala), July 28, 1964, p. 2, in Box 1, Aliya Hassen Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. The collection also contains the press release on Muslim Mosque, Inc. letterhead, dated April 20, 1964.
80. Malcolm X, *On Afro-American History*, p. 15.
81. Malcolm X, "Not Just an American Problem," p. 147; also see Malcolm X, WINS Panel Discussion, in *February 1965*, p. 204.
82. Malcolm X's daughters placed a presumably extensive collection of Malcolm's speeches, letters, photos, and diaries on long-term deposit with the New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in late December 2002/early January 2003. As of this writing, some of the materials have been processed, but nothing has been released. Some of the "most significant" items are diaries written during Malcolm's trips to Asia and Africa in 1964. In the epilogue to the *Autobiography*, Alex Haley recalled that Malcolm withheld information from him about his trip, because he was hoping that his "carefully kept diary might be turned into another book." This suggests that a wealth of information about Malcolm's meetings and contacts in Africa can be found in the diaries at the Schomburg Center. See "Malcolm X Papers Will Come to New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture," Schomburg Center Press Release, January 7, 2003, available online at <http://www.nypl.org/press/malcolmx.cfm>.
83. Malcolm X, "There's A Worldwide Revolution Going On," in *February 1965*, p. 132.
84. Malcolm X, WINS Panel Discussion, in *February 1965*, p. 205.