"MOSLEM'S THAT OLD TIME RELIGION": MOORISH SCIENCE AND THE MEANING OF ISLAM IN 1920S BLACK CHICAGO

by

Susan Nance
B.A., Simon Fraser University, 1996

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Department
of
History

©Susan Nance 1999
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
March 1999

All rights reserved. This work may not be
reproduced in whole or part, by photocopy
or other means, without permission of the author.

National Library of Canada
Acquisitions and Bibliographic Services
395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada
Acquisitions et services bibliographiques
395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-51431-5

Canada

Abstract

This thesis examines the first known indigenous African-American Muslim movement, the Moorish Science Temple of America, and its prophet, Noble Drew Ali, as reflections and shapers of black perceptions of Islam in 1920s Chicago. Independent of proselytization by Muslims, Ali presented a system of beliefs drawn from American interpretations of Eastern cultures found in Black Spiritualism and mystical Freemasonry which he combined with his own radical conceptions of race and world history. Ali's teachings were recognizably Islamic to interwar African Americans since he described his new religion as native to Africa, knowing "no colorline," and affirming the divine essence within each believer. Indeed, Moorish Science catered to popular perceptions of Islam provided by books and magazines, oral tradition and prominent black newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender*.

Ali framed his religion in the rituals and regalia of elite racial uplift movements and African-American fraternalism in order to distance himself from the street cultures associated with black Spiritualism and Chicago's many independent religious entrepreneurs. Nonetheless, the movement attracted energetic, civic-minded blacks from every walk of life who expanded the movement and spread the prophet's ideas throughout the Mid-West and South. This thesis analyzes the texts through which Noble Drew Ali articulated his revelation, contemporary press coverage of the movement, and the Moors' own newspaper and organizational documents to conclude that Ali's Islam was actually a form of black Spiritualism. Further, Ali's real success was to present some truly radical ideas about history, race and spirituality within a religion which attracted the support of African Americans from the mainstream of black society.

Table of Contents

	Approval Page	ii
	Abstract	iii
	Introduction	1
1	Respectability and Religion in Chicago	10
2	Moorish Science at Work, 1925-1929	53
3	Moorish Science and the Meaning of Islam	99
	Bibliography	140

Introduction

In his influential autobiography, Malcolm X described fishing for converts for the Nation of Islam on the streets of 1950s Detroit,

> The recruitment attitude at the temple seemed to me to amount to a self-defeating waiting view. . . an assumption that Allah would bring us more Muslims. I felt that Allah would be more inclined to help those who helped themselves. . . All of my life, as you know, I had been an activist, I had been impatient.[1]

While Malcolm X was in many ways an extraordinary person, he was also representative of many African Americans who have been attracted to one of the indigenous black Muslim movements in the United States. Like Malcolm, many blacks have found their sense of impatient activism to be integral to their participation in movements which coupled unusual beliefs about history, race and religion with the apparently traditional ideologies of self-help and individual responsibility. One of the earliest black Muslim movements, the Moorish Science Temple of America, presented interwar blacks with a religion that combined revisionist world history and alternative mystical spirituality with established styles of black political and economic activity. Many blacks found this combination of beliefs and practices compelling because they were drawn entirely from popular forms in the African-American cultural context. Although, the religion of the Moorish Science Temple bears little resemblance to Islam, this movement formed a crucial stage in the development of indigenous African-American Islam, which inspired later blacks to investigate Islam for themselves. Thus the Moorish Science Temple provides

---

[1] Malcolm X, with Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*(1964, repr. New York: Balantine Books, 1973), 199-200.

an answer to the question of how Islam came to America, and how religions move and change from one culture to another.

The Moorish Science Temple is a particularly compelling vehicle for the examination of this pairing of militance and conservatism among African-American Muslims because the Moorish prophet, Noble Drew Ali, was among the first twentieth-century African Americans to spread Islam among blacks in the United States. After migrating north during World War I, Ali began appearing on Chicago's street corners clad in a turban and colorful robes. Presenting himself as the prophet of Allah, Ali built a network of storefront temples in a dozen states between 1925 and 1929. His synthesis of religion and black nationalism has influenced the shape of African-American Islam ever since.

Contemporary accounts of the Moorish Science Temple emphasized how ill-informed urban blacks were about Islam or its texts. The local black newspaper, the *Chicago Defender*, initially described Ali as a respected community leader. Later, as internecine rivalries destroyed his movement, the *Defender* described Ali as a charlatan who communicated a false Islam to blacks in the interest of building a personal cult. These early reports have in many ways sullied the movement's reputation as a sincerely religious movement and have colored the analyses which followed.[2] Black writers in the 1940s were more sympathetic to the prophet, describing Noble Drew Ali as a well-meaning man who was nonetheless ill-equipped to manage his movement, thus falling victim to the greed and violence of opportunists who infiltrated his organization in the few years leading up to the prophet's

---

[2] "Moorish Leader is Postmaster's Guest," *Chicago Defender*, hereafter *CD*, 30 June 1928; "Cult Leader Lured Girls to His Harem," *CD*, 23 March 1929.

death.[3] Later treatments have glorified Ali, apologizing for his heterodoxy and refusing to scrutinize his activities, claiming the Islamic "spirit" of the movement legitimizes it.[4] These latest analysts have, nonetheless, taken the Moorish Science Temple seriously as a religion and speculated on Ali's influences in an attempt to account for the arrival of Islam in interwar urban black America. McCloud, Haddad and Smith, and Turner have all pointed to the presence of a few Muslim missionaries and/or small communities of immigrant Muslims in interwar Chicago to suggest Ali mimicked or learned from such believers in constructing his Islam.[5] While these suggestions attempt to posit a direct communication of Islamic beliefs or practices from Muslims to Ali, they are misleading since they draw attention away from the direct evidence we have of Ali's sources. In fact, the significance of the Moorish Science Temple lies precisely in the fact that Ali's religion was a synthesis of non-Muslim American beliefs and practices which Ali simply termed "Islam." Further, the previously unexamined details of Ali's life in Chicago reveal divisions between the prophet and believers shared by many such interwar black religious movements, showing how very typical the Moorish Science Temple was.

---

[3] Arthur Huff Fauset, *Black Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1944), 41-51; Arna Bontemps and Jack Conroy, *Anyplace But Here* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966), 174-77.

[4] Aminah Beverly McCloud, *African American Islam* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 10-18, 54-56; Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 71-3, 90-100; Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith, *Mission to America: Five Sectarian Communities in North America* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1993), 92-98; José Vittorio Pimenta-Bey, "Some 'Myths' of the Moorish Science Temple: An Afrocentric Historical Analysis," Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1996.

[5] McCloud, 201; Haddad and Smith, 197; Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience*, 72.

To make sense of Ali's teachings, his Orientalist accoutrements, and the motivations of his followers, we must contextualize the movement as having arisen independent of Muslim proselytization, solely from the American context. This contextualization must proceed from the assumption that Chicago's blacks were rational, critical thinkers who were not "fooled" by the prophet. Rather, these men and women evaluated the Moorish Science Temple's ideals and structure relative to the many styles of religious, political, economic and social organization available to them in interwar urban America. Ali's success as a leader is both surprising, in light of the ample competition he had, and predictable, considering how he drew on and catered to the existing beliefs of urban African Americans. Combining aspects of African-American fraternalism, black Spiritualism, and popular perceptions of African and Asian history, Noble Drew Ali presented a new American religion he called Islam, the Moorish Science. Ali used well-known African-American cultural cues and symbols to refer to a long tradition of black mysticism, race pride and respectable self-help. Thus, to many of Ali's contemporaries, Moorish Science was practical, authentic and profound.

The first chapter of this thesis contextualizes the Moorish Science Temple by examining late 1920s Chicago and the culture from which Ali drew his ideas. Post-Great Migration Chicago was a site of experimentation for many blacks, particularly Southerners who arrived in the North looking for jobs and safety from white violence. This experimentation resulted in the development of a militant but conservative element in black society which found the freedom to flex its organizational and intellectual muscles in interwar urban America. Best described as "respectable" blacks, this group made up the bulk of urban African America. Chicago's respectable blacks cultivated a mode of political action and personal behavior which encouraged

African Americans to establish themselves as an integral part of America by confounding racist white assumptions about them. This philosophy stemmed from a belief in the potential of American citizenship to grant blacks the equality they deserved, and the responsibility of every African American to behave in ways that would give whites no excuse to deny this equality any longer.[6]

Combining both the impatient activism and personal responsibility for success expressed by Malcolm X decades later, the ideal of respectability defined urban black thought in Chicago during Ali's days there. Black Chicago was by no means united at this time however. African Americans from every walk of life redefined respectability in the Northern context, and alternately applauded or criticized one another in the interest of promoting preferred behavior. The limits of elite black respectability were made clear in the discourse of the black press and upper-class community organizations which admonished Chicago's Southern migrants to lead frugal and chaste lives, and behave politely and quietly in public. The *Chicago Defender*, the most influential black-owned newspaper in the country, prided itself in promoting elite respectability by highlighting successful black businesses, community organizations or politicians, and publicly humiliating blacks who broke the law or defied respectable morality.

In spite of the complaints of the black press and other elite voices of respectability, most poor, working African Americans ignored such moralizing, having little stake in white opinion. Unlike those elites involved in the NAACP or other organizations of educated, relatively-wealthy African Americans striving for integration, these blacks did not define respectable

---

[6] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1993), 186-7.

behavior in white middle-class terms. As a result, they lived their lives on their own terms, often joining renegade organizations such as Marcus Garvey's UNIA or the many grass-roots storefront churches. These movements presented more militant blacks with venues in which to define respectability for themselves by taking an active part in the debate over acceptable black thought and action. For these African Americans respectability included a militance which actually stemmed from blacks' position as American citizens, and which interpreted American citizenship not as a privilege, but as a universal right. Many of these militant African Americans were Southerners who came to the North expecting to exercise those rights of American citizenship denied them in the South. Thus they were demanded access to the vote and participation in the political process, the freedom to organize and congregate away from the view and judgment of whites, and the right to speak loudly and frankly about American race relations. These men and women often irritated more conservative blacks by breaking the law or rejecting elite modes of public behavior.

Some innovative black religious movements, like the Moorish Science Temple, nonetheless amalgamated alternative ideas about religion, history and race with a respect for law and order, and an endorsement of machine politics in order to escape state harassment and criticism from other segments of respectable black society. Yet their alternative ideologies often attracted those blacks who viewed citizenship as a right and whose militant agitating both energized and divided such movements. The Moorish Science Temple competed for converts in this atmosphere of experimentation and debate in interwar Chicago. Though it attracted converts from every part of the city's diverse community of respectable blacks, the Moorish Science Temple was unable to

grow into a powerful alternative to established black Christianity, leaving that work to later black Muslim organizations.

The second chapter recounts and analyzes some of the events of Ali's life in Chicago and his own articulation of respectability and American citizenship. Noble Drew Ali was one of many street orators who gradually built a large following by preaching a religion that presented an interpretation of black identity African Americans found both challenging and familiar. Ali taught that American blacks could take their rightful place among America's many ethnic groups only by defining themselves, not in terms of race, but ethnicity, as Moorish-Americans. Conflict between Ali and his followers over public behavior and the appropriate methods of proselytization eventually led to Ali's murder and the splintering of the movement in the 1930s into a number of branches, some of which still exist today. If Ali had any critical flaw it was his unwillingness to realize that his converts would refuse to follow his interpretation of Islam blindly, just as Ali himself refused to adhere to other Muslims' interpretation of the religion. The details of Ali's life shed light on these followers, who sincerely believed in Ali's prophethood, but often had their own more militant interpretations of his teachings. Conflicts between the Moors and their prophet speak of the difficulties inherent in uniting any large group by appealing to and arousing their militance and then trying to direct it.

The details of Ali's days in Chicago are also critical in demystifying the prophet. Plenty of myth surrounds Noble Drew Ali which, while of value to many believers and sympathizers, hides Ali's character as a pragmatic and practical religious leader who valued earthly advancement as much as otherworldly salvation. While many contemporary African Americans may have perceived Ali's exotic name and persona as bizarre or humorous, for

many others he was an authentic interpreter of Islam who translated his spiritual beliefs into a political and economic plan which could immediately benefit African Americans. This plan included participation in Chicago's political machine and the prophet's preoccupation with Moorish Science Temple revenues, necessary to keep his movement functioning. Ali attempted to discipline Moors who confronted whites on the street or preached Moorish Science at the workplace, activities which were outside his understanding of respectable behavior and irritated the police. Nonetheless, the prophet participated in ostensibly illegal but more respectable activities by actively courting members of Chicago's political machine. Indeed, he needed these men's support to guarantee the success of Moorish businesses and to achieve his goals of Moorish economic self-sufficiency.

The final chapter pulls apart and examines Noble Drew Ali's religion, putting aside temporarily Ali's naming of his beliefs as "Islam." This examination shows Ali drew exclusively from American interpretations of Eastern culture found in Ethiopianism, Black Spiritualism, New Thought philosophy and black fraternalism. His religious synthesis is striking precisely due to the absence of any obvious contact with Muslims or their scriptures. Further, he adopted only those teachings and rituals which coincided with his interpretation of black respectability, bringing together "family values"-type morality, and Washingtonian ideals of self-help and personal responsibility. To these he added white and black American mystical understandings of the divine potential of each person, and popular black perceptions of the Middle East and Asia as sources of ancient wisdom distinct from white Christianity. For Ali, Islam was an ancient religion, native to Africa, which espoused the unity of non-whites and the divine within each

person which blacks were to make evident through their respectable behavior.

The emergence of Moorish Science in 1920s Chicago reveals a complicated process of religious transmission across the Atlantic Ocean, not through a simple, unidirectional believer-to-convert communication, but through Ali's reinterpretation of Western interpretations of Islamic culture. Moorish Science's "Western-Islamic" tradition may not resemble Islam to the outsider, being based on popular 1920s African-American beliefs, and being spread by a turban-clad black Southerner. However, for interwar blacks Moorish Science was in fact authentically Islamic. Noble Drew Ali's genius was to present a system of beliefs that used existing black cultural cues designating "Islamicness" and respectability. Thus Ali succeeded, temporarily at least, in making an Islam specific to blacks' needs, carving out an entry point for some form of Islam into the African-American consciousness.

Chapter One: Respectability and Religion in Chicago

Noble Drew Ali first appeared in Chicago in 1925 standing on street corners and in empty lots preaching his ideas to passers-by. Some of these men and women stopped to listen to the prophet; some simply laughed, shook their heads at his turban and moved on to work or home. Chicago's streets were home to many such street-preachers and philosophers. The city's African Americans were astute judges of such aspiring community leaders and their often unusual ideas. This chapter reveals this economy of ideas among Chicago's blacks into which Noble Drew Ali stepped and had to compete. In fact he competed not only with other street speakers but with all of Chicago society, including the black press and the many organizations of respectable blacks such as fraternal orders, women's clubs, charity and educational organizations. Chicago was an ideal environment for the prophet, providing him with thousands of potential converts, many of whom were open to new ways of thinking and acting. However, Chicago was also a tough market to break into because the city's African Americans had so many voices to listen to and so many options open to them.

This chapter describes and analyzes these voices and options to contextualize the prophet's ideas and his success. I focus in particular on aspects of African-American culture from which Ali drew, but which have received little attention in secondary sources. Ali framed his revelation in cultural codes and styles of communication he borrowed from the black fraternal orders, black Christianity, popular representations of Islam and Eastern countries, and Chicago's alternative religions. An understanding of these aspects of black life is crucial to understand why the Moorish Science Temple was taken seriously by African Americans. Many blacks also drew

from these sources in redefining their identities as members of respectable society, as transplanted Southerners, as descendants of Africans, and as American citizens.

Because so much of what we know about the Moorish Science Temple comes from the *Chicago Defender*, the city's most prominent black newspaper, we must examine the newspaper's coverage of other religions and community organizations, and of black Chicago in general, to contextualize coverage of the Moors. Therefore, this thesis is necessarily concerned with the relationship between Noble Drew Ali and the *Chicago Defender*. Unlike many newspapers, the *Defender* made no pretense of presenting unbiased news, but openly billed itself as a voice of black respectability, promoter of black achievement, and unofficial policeman of the African-American community. This chapter examines the *Defender's* coverage of black life to reveal the debate between African Americans in Chicago and all over the country over black behavior and the meaning of American citizenship.

The period during which Moorish Science blossomed in Chicago followed a large migration of African Americans to the city that began during World War I. This population shift, known as the Great Migration, was the most significant event in the history of African Americans since the end of slavery. The face of urban America was irrevocably altered as densely populated black communities situated amidst usually-hostile white neighborhoods resulted in mutual resentment, increased segregation and occasional riots. Still, the gradual urbanization of large numbers of Southern blacks, however painful, also served as a crucial transition which placed blacks at the centre of American life in many ways. Cities like Chicago, New York and Detroit became sites of communication, competition and cooperation between black men and women exploring new ways of relating to one another,

to the state, to whites, and to God. The urban African-American cultures which thus developed have since taken the place of rural black communities in supplying Americans with their impressions of black America. Indeed today the majority of the citizens in many American cities are African American, and the effect these urban communities have had in shaping the United States in the twentieth century cannot be underestimated.

Initially scholars and the popular American imagination perceived the Great Migration as a mass exodus of rural blacks from the Deep South directly to the cities of the North. Stereotypes developed which imagined blacks suddenly dropping their hoes in the fields at the urging of labor agents who directed them to idling north-bound trains. Once in Chicago or Harlem these men and women, supposedly too unsophisticated to comprehend the massive cities they found, became bewildered and lonely, resorting to escapist religious and political movements, or a life of unemployment and crime. In reality, the African Americans who left the South often moved from city to city within the South before arriving North. For most this transience was part of a long-considered decision to leave home in search of something many simply termed as "freedom." Though each migrant's motives were unique, the idea of freedom encompassed everything to which blacks felt they were entitled as equal citizens of the United States - freedom from violence and judicial or police harassment, access to high quality jobs and education, and the ability to exercise the right to vote in peace for candidates of their own race. Forsaking the older ideal of landed independence, blacks sought the twentieth-century interpretation of the American Dream in the city. This conception of "freedom" did not mean blind emulation of whites however. Rather, it meant

the freedom to live proudly as blacks while still being considered full American citizens.[1]

Nonetheless, unflattering and inaccurate portrayals of Southern migrants permeated American popular culture and proliferated in academic writings. Many of these writers proceeded from the patronizing assumption that African Americans were simple people best suited to rural living. Further, these academics conceived of cities as inherently disruptive and unhealthy places which tore apart families and corrupted citizens who might otherwise build strong communities. Known as the "urban pathologists," they did refrain from blaming African Americans entirely for the situation they encountered in urban America. They were quick to acknowledge the segregation, discrimination, violence, and substandard health care and education available to African Americans. Still these writers lamented the perceived broken-down state of northern working-class black families and communities, insinuating that blacks had ultimately brought this state of affairs upon themselves by not remaining in the rural South. Northern black elites had been making similar arguments for years, voicing their resentment against Southern migrants who refused to internalize the values and behavior Northerners had developed in order to coexist in relative peace with Northern whites.[2]

---

[1] James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 17, 42-47; St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (1945; repr. New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 58-62; Milton C. Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land: African-American Religion and the Great Migration* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 40-43; Earl Lewis, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 37; Eric Foner, "The Meaning of Freedom in the Age of Emancipation," *Journal of American History* 81 (September 1994): 458-460.

[2] C. Wright Mills, "The Professional Ideology of Social Pathologists," *American Journal of Sociology* 49 (September 1942): 165-80; Fred H. Mattews,

Many Chicago blacks, particularly the well-to-do, resented the increasing segregation that resulted from the influx of black Southerners into Chicago's already overcrowded black neighborhoods. The educated and relatively-wealthy African-American elite found itself unable to find housing outside black neighborhoods, and thus lived cheek by jowl with working-class blacks and, most disturbing of all, those who turned black neighborhoods into vice districts. People of all races who were perceived to be on the margins of Chicago society - prostitutes, homosexuals, interracial couples - flocked to Chicago's black community to exist free from the disapproval of neighbors or family. Blacks were left to deal with the illegal activities plaguing these areas, including bootlegging, prostitution, and gambling, not to mention endless streams of white "slummers" who came to marvel at the exoticism and hear some good Jazz. Many African Americans rightly felt these slumming whites took away with them a perception of black Chicago that was wholly unflattering. In fact, it was in these districts, created when white progressive reformers shut down such areas in white parts of town, that Americans' conceptions of race were developed. Kevin Mumford has shown that both whites and blacks used the behavior of the vice districts' denizens to define black masculinity and femininity. It did not help matters that local white newspapers such as the *Tribune* only printed those stories of blacks which portrayed them as criminals.[3]

Black elites struggling to save face with white Chicago but unable to deny the black contribution to the city's vice districts claimed that those

---

Quest for an American Sociology: Robert E. Park and the Chicago School. (Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977), 75-76; Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 130, 146, 150; Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 84-85, 163-4; Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 72-75.

[3] Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 210.

blacks involved in illegal activity were always Southern migrants who knew no better. This tactic reinforced the need for elite leadership while attempting to keep upper-class African Americans' reputation intact. This characterization of black Southerners was not accurate, of course; most migrants were "respectable" working-class Americans. Respectability, within the black community, entailed being gainfully employed and active in one or more of black Chicago's many community organizations. The most common forms of work were in service industries as maids, washer women, porters, waiters, janitors or unskilled laborers. African Americans had yet to make much headway breaking into the plentiful manufacturing jobs controlled by white-only unions. Similar discrimination kept the vast majority of African Americans out of white collar work. The few well-to-do blacks held jobs as school teachers, postal employees, train porters, and an even smaller number as police officers, lawyers, funeral home directors, real estate agents, or small business owners.[4]

It is difficult to ascertain whether black elites had any power. Indeed, the traditional black upper-class in the United States, the "talented tenth" as Du Bois had termed them, began to be eclipsed after the turn of the century by a new generation of black leaders drawn from the mainstream of black society. In Chicago this trend was evident in the African-American debate over the "politics of respectability," as Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has termed it.[5] Many blacks built on traditional values of industriousness and self-

---

[4] Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 1-3; Harold F. Gosnell, *Negro Politicians: The Rise of Negro Politics in Chicago* (1935; repr. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 244-5, 280, 302-4; Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 214-262.

[5] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1993), 185-207.

help espoused by Booker T. Washington during the nineteenth-century to argue that each African American must take personal responsibility for stopping racial discrimination. Believing the behavior of the poorest Southern migrants and those blacks who ran the vice districts reinforced white perceptions of black laziness, immorality and lack of political sophistication, blacks from all walks of life advocated "respectable" black behavior to show white America how undeserving they were of further discrimination. Respectable black behavior mirrored white middle-class behavior to a large degree since many African American elites had internalized dominant white ideas of respectability and citizenship. For elites the politics of respectability were founded on the perception that cultural differences, not race, motivated white discrimination. For those average working folk who perceived their citizenship as a right, not a privilege to be earned, respectability entailed upholding one's dignity, independence, and difference pragmatically, regardless of white standards of morality or public behavior.

Nonetheless, all segments of respectable black society believed it was possible to be both black and equal American citizens. Indeed, in theory blacks in the Northern United States had all the rights white Americans enjoyed. However, in practice discrimination, unofficial segregation and white violence against blacks precluded their full or equal participation in the political or social life of America. In spite of their frustration over inequality and discrimination, respectable blacks rejected violent political protest, knowing that it would bring white retaliation. These men and women were nonetheless exceedingly proud and militant, often pairing innovative and

challenging ideas about race and black history with respectable behavior and established means of economic and political activity.[6]

Robert S. Abbott was one of Chicago's most successful black entrepreneurs and a firm believer in the power of black respectability. Through his newspaper, the *Chicago Defender*, Abbott became one of the most influential voices of respectability and attempted to influence African-American behavior and boost blacks' public image. The *Defender* was the most prominent black newspaper in the country and sought to promote the laudable activities of "race" members (Abbott considered the terms "Negro" and "Black" to be pejorative). The paper in time grew to be a huge success, distributed and read cover-to-cover by blacks all over the country. Abbott's paper had been instrumental in promoting the migration to Chicago, providing Southerners with a view of life in the North, and information on travel and accommodation. Abbott gave blacks strong encouragement to leave the South, whose Jim Crow order he criticized constantly. Abbott's paper also functioned to develop a sense of nationalism and race pride among American blacks by presenting the best and brightest of black Chicago society as role models for the rest of the community.[7]

In spite of having encouraged Southerners to leave the South, Abbott was not completely comfortable with their presence in the North, and like other race leaders took it upon himself to police the migrants' public behavior. Abbott resented the poverty and perceived laziness and sloppiness of Southern migrants. He blamed these qualities for their failure to uplift themselves as he

---

[6] Gosnell, *Negro Politicians*, 124-145; Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 469.

[7] Mary E. Stovall, "The *Chicago Defender* in the Progressive Era," *Illinois Historical Journal* 83, no. 3 (1990): 160; James R. Grossman, "Blowing the Trumpet: The *Chicago Defender* and Black Migration During World War I," *Illinois Historical Journal* 78, no. 2 (1985): 85-96; Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 410-2.

had as a poor migrant who started up the *Defender* with only a few dollars, eventually becoming a millionaire. Both the *Defender* and elite racial uplift organizations, such as the Chicago Urban League issued articles and pamphlets admonishing migrants not to speak loudly in public, groom in front of open windows, walk the streets in "boudoir caps" and slippers, or act rudely towards whites. Race leaders also complained of blacks who frequented speakeasies and gambling spots, parading their behavior before amused slumming whites. In fact most blacks ignored such commands and lived their lives on their own terms. Nonetheless, much of African America valued the *Defender*, admired Abbott, and shared his belief in the potential of respectable black behavior to improve blacks' position in the United States.[8]

The *Chicago Defender* promoted many respectable black individuals who had risen to positions of power and wealth, giving them nationwide coverage in the interest of racial uplift. The *Defender* gave great attention to black politicians such as Oscar de Priest and Louis B. Anderson. Both men had long careers in city politics, de Priest going on to be elected to Congress in 1929, the first African American to have done so in twenty-eight years. In spite of their association with gambling syndicates and organized crime through their connections to the patronage networks of the city's political machine, both men were perceived to be making the best of the political system as it existed and were generally viewed as loyal servants of the race and self-made men. The *Defender* also promoted successful businessmen such as African-American bank owners Jesse Binga and Anthony Ovington. Both men had started businesses, like Abbott, from the ground up with little capital. Also, like Abbott they had both capitalized on the black community as a captive audience, with Ovington selling first cosmetics, next life insurance, and then,

---

8 Ibid.

like Binga, banking services, all by and for African Americans. The *Defender* favored these businesses since they did not funnel money out of the black community, but rather reinvested in those people who supported them. Black entertainers and athletes often got the bulk of their public exposure through the *Defender*. Similarly, the paper highlighted the activities of less wealthy or famous but still respectable African Americans. A 'Society Page' detailed Women's clubs, their balls, charitable works and meetings. The *Defender* also publicized and applauded meetings of black churches, fraternal orders, and children's' clubs.[9]

Along with such promotional coverage, the *Defender* carried stories that were entirely unflattering to certain African Americans. Reports of black Chicago's seemingly endless supply of violent crime ran side by side with articles criticizing lynching in the South or lauding the achievements of black businessmen and politicians. Abbott's paper broadcast to the whole nation headlines such as "Quarrels With Husband, Drinks Lysol," "Kills Wife Who Begged Him To Work," or "Attacks Lover With Hatchet." *Defender* editors did not feel such stories defeated the paper's purpose of countering the negative coverage of African Americans because few whites read the *Defender*. Further, Abbott and his staff saw the paper as an unofficial policing mechanism for the black community. Stories detailing domestic disputes and petty quarrels-turned-deadly served as shaming rituals for their subjects. Indeed, the widespread success of the *Defender* could be both a blessing and a curse to many African Americans caught in such situations. Any behavior that embarrassed the race, rather than being ignored or covered up by the

---

[9] Gosnell, *Negro Politicians*, 107; Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 349-50, 465; Anne Meis Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood: African American Women's Clubs in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 34.

Defender, was put on full view and discredited to publicly ostracize offenders before the rest of the black community.[10]

Chicago's black Methodist and Baptist churches stood with the *Defender* as dominant voices of elite black respectability, though newer movements and congregations had begun to challenge the traditional churches' clout. Often found in storefront venues, the Holiness, Sanctified, Spiritualist and other religionists catered to Southerners who preferred the intimacy of smaller congregations and who believed the traditional churches were more concerned with the collection plate that the fate of believers. Of course there was still support for the traditional Baptist and Methodist denominations, but they were not able to attract all of the many Southern migrants in the city. This was due, in part, to black churches' insistence that their leadership be highly educated, which necessarily excluded the majority of African Americans and favored those who came from the "talented tenth." Unable to participate as deacons, ushers, or auxiliary members, many Southerners looked elsewhere to express their spirituality. In fact, the migration had caught church leaders off guard. As whole congregations disappeared from the South and reappeared elsewhere, church officials bickered over whether to move ministers to new urban locations, or whether simply to discourage migration. If Southern blacks did attend an established church in Chicago, middle-class Baptists and Methodists winced at their boisterous religious practices, and were torn between welcoming such believers into their churches or leaving them to their own emerging leadership. By the late 1920s the established churches had been unable to speak to the needs of many

---

[10] Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 70; Mumford, *Interzones*, 46; Victoria W. Walcott, "Mediums, Messages, and Lucky Numbers: African-American Female Spiritualists and Numbers Runners in Interwar Detroit" in *The Geography of Identity*, ed. Patricia Jaeger (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 273-84.

migrants, losing members and political clout to the advantage of an emerging class of popular, scantily-educated religious leaders.[11]

Indeed migration to Chicago inspired many Southerners to seek new ways of experiencing God. In his important examination of the effect of the Great Migration on black religion, Milton Sernett has convincingly argued that many African Americans perceived migration to Chicago as a religiously charged experience, speaking of the event in Biblical terms, and refusing to follow any obvious human leader. Yet he does not see this grass-roots movement as a leaderless one, but rather a movement of migrants who felt they were being given an opportunity from God himself, who would lead them North in and to safety. Perceived as the second Great Emancipation, many migrants saw divine power at work when the availability of war-time industry jobs coincided with an untenable situation in the South. Indeed, those Southerners who packed their bags and boarded trains north frequently wrote home to express a belief that God had rewarded them with an opportunity that was transforming their lives as emancipation from slavery had transformed the lives of earlier generations. Particularly since Southern black religion was focused around relief from the hardships of poverty, indebtedness, and white oppression, escape from the South must have indeed functioned in the Southern black popular imagination as an emancipation of sorts.[12]

If migrants had been self-motivated in leaving the South, they were nonetheless quick to support a new generation of political and social leaders once they arrived in Chicago feeling invigorated and optimistic. The cultural soup created by the mixing of Southern and Northern blacks in an urban context where they had access to every type of political, economic, and

---

[11] Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 20, 96, 154, 163-4; Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 399, 634-53.

[12] Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 87-90.

religious philosophy promoted experimentation by Southerners who considered themselves militant and proud. New leaders were successful to the extent that they could recognize and cater to the militancy and pride in so many African Americans, while providing a unique synthesis of ideas to focus their energies. The most successful of these leaders was the Jamaican Marcus Garvey whose Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) has best been described by Lawrence Levine as a revitalization movement. Garvey came to the United States in 1916 seeking to revitalize blacks' perception of their identity as a distinct group, and to revitalize the African continent, which was at that time subject to almost complete colonial domination. As a result of his years living in colonial Jamaica, Garvey believed that blacks must migrate back to Africa in order to achieve independence and prosperity. Though this philosophy was resented by many Africans, over one million blacks in the United States flocked to join Garvey's UNIA. They embraced his Booker Washington-style teachings of black self-help and militancy, and appreciated his confidence in African Americans' abilities and intelligence. Though well-meaning and very successful in gathering followers, Marcus Garvey ultimately fell victim to his own lack of experience in business and intense harassment by the American government, and was deported in 1927.[13]

West Indian immigrants like Marcus Garvey tended to challenge elite respectable African-American definitions of right conduct since, being

---

[13] Lawrence W. Levine, "Marcus Garvey and the Politics of Revitalization" in *Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century*, ed. John Hope Franklin and August Meier (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 110-13; Irma Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900-1930* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 112-25; E. David Cronen, *Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957), 54; Tony Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association.* (Westport, Conneticut: Greenwood Press, 1976), 96-100, 120.

foreign citizens, they did not attempt to define themselves as Americans. Thus, many elites perceived Garvey's demands for black self-sufficiency, politically, economically and socially to preclude full participation in American life. Garvey probably did not intend for his movement to be perceived as dangerous or subversive to the state. Nonetheless, African-American leaders resented his militancy because it was not framed in the values of respectable civic duty. The leaders found Garveyite agitating annoying and too critical of whites. They complained that he drew the negative attention of the police, the FBI and other whites to the black community, and that he inspired politically unsophisticated blacks to think of themselves as Africans first, and Americans second. When the ranks of the UNIA began to expand, members of the respectable black elite often reduced their criticism to name-calling and ethnic slurs, such as accusing Garvey's followers of being a collection of "ill-educated Jamaican peasants."[14] Perhaps partly out of jealousy, educated and wealthy blacks, particularly *Defender* publisher Robert Abbott, ridiculed Marcus Garvey and attempted to sway African-American opinion against him. Nonetheless, blacks from all walks of life joined Garvey's movement. These men and women considered themselves respectable American citizens and participated in his uplift programs, even if they did not plan to migrate to Africa themselves.[15]

---

[14] Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations*, 82-84; Randall K. Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement: The Institutionalization of a Black Civil Religion* (Metuchen, N. J. and London: Scarecrow Press, 1978), 40.

[15] Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations*, 121. Abbott waged a campaign against Garvey for several years regularly publishing damaging articles in the *Defender*. For example, when Harlem police burst in on Garvey's wife and her lover, Joseph Fraser, while Garvey was in prison in Atlanta, the *Defender* remarked snidely in a front page report, "While President Garvey, imperial potentate, has been marooned in Atlanta's federal strongbox, Frazer has been filling the presidential shoes." "Trap Mrs. Garvey in Love Nest," *Chicago Defender*, 17 April, 1926, hereafter *CD*,.

Perhaps many of Garvey's detractors may also have disliked him in part because of his claim to being the "Provisional President" of Africa. This claim to authority and cultural ownership of Africa was politically loaded since Africa, both modern and ancient, formed a key part of African-American identity. African Americans had long been debating over the degree to which their identities as the descendants of Africans was compatible with American citizenship. This endeavor was complicated by most white Americans' perception of modern sub-Saharan Africans as both the childlike subjects of colonial governments, and barbaric and savage pre-modern peoples. Simultaneously, white European and American academics celebrated the ancient cultures of the Nile Valley and Middle East that had established the foundations of Western culture. These lands, as well as North Africa, were granted a kind of honorary Caucasian status. Ignoring the racially diverse makeup of such places, whites were unwilling to allow African Americans any connection to ancient Egypt, or the Moorish or Islamic Empires. Many blacks had internalized these academic perceptions and also believed in the glory of ancient cultures on the African continent, while also perceiving modern Africa as backward.[16]

Thus, the African-American interpretation of African history was characterized by a paradox; ancient Africa existed as the home of the Nile Valley culture which had created the foundations of Western Civilization, yet modern Africa in their minds was a place of unrestrained barbarity and ignorance. This paradox was a direct consequence of blacks' identities as both descendants of Africans and Americans. In their discussion of the African-

---

[16] Levine, "Marcus Garvey," 120-3; Dennis Hickey and Kenneth C. Wylie, *An Enchanting Darkness: The American Vision of Africa in the Twentieth Century* (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1993), 271. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 39.

American idea of Africa, Dennis Hickey and Kenneth Wylie have explained, "The ravages of slavery had not obliterated the historical memory - details had been lost, but this loss of personal particulars had rendered the abstract idea of Africa all the more powerful and compelling."[17] Thus African Americans were ideally placed to reinvent Africa for themselves precisely because they had no living memory of the continent. In fact there is a very long tradition of such reinterpretation in black history known as Ethiopianism. The first literate slave to be handed a copy of the Bible no doubt eventually came across Psalms 68:31, "Princes shall come forth from Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands to God." African Americans have interpreted this passage as predicting the rebirth of Africa and as a reminder of their perceived glorious past. The 1896 Ethiopian defeat of invading Italian armies compounded this belief which was propounded in sermons throughout African-American churches, and voiced in the black press, gradually permeating African-American popular culture.[18]

Black spirituality was molded by these Biblical reinterpretations, African history, and their extension into black conceptions of race. Many American blacks believed Jesus and the Israelites to have been black, rejecting the blond, blue-eyed Christ of white Christianity. In Chicago the well-known Reverend James Webb advertised his sermons in the *Defender* weekly. His notices announced "JESUS WAS A NEGRO BY BLOOD - King Tut was a Negro by Blood," and "Negro universal king with woolly hair is coming to rule the world. Proven by biblical history. . . The race problem will be settled

---

17 Hickey and Wylie, *An Enchanting Darkness*, 250-72.

18 Drake, St. Clair, *The Redemption of Africa and Black Religion.* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1970), 72-5; Hickey and Wylie, *An Enchanting Darkness*, 252-6; Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 109.

by him."[19] Other blacks had a more complex, multi-racial vision of the character of Bible-age inhabitants of the Holy Land. Randall Burkett has noted that Marcus Garvey argued that Jesus had had "the blood of all races in him," in an attempt to avoid the wrath of some of his detractors who accused him of advocating racial separatism.[20] Nonetheless, Garvey posited a special relationship between blacks and God by pointing to the New Testament's reference to Simon the Cyrenian, the black man Roman soldiers forced to carry Jesus's crucifix up Calvary Hill when Jesus became unable to carry it himself. He argued blacks indeed were carrying a burden for God and Jesus, and, therefore, had a special place in God's plan for humanity.[21]

Black religious interpretations of black history found in the works of Reverend Webb or the theology of Marcus Garvey demonstrate that the African-American depiction of ancient African history was necessarily filled with hyperbole. In response to the equally distorted white histories which denied Egyptians identity as Africans, the racial diversity of the continent, and African Americans' claim to that heritage, black intellectuals and many others advocated revisionist accounts of the African past. Hickie and Wylie argue that around 1920 black scholarship on African history began to be overshadowed by a popular counterpart which exaggerated ancient African achievement, giving little credit to its European inheritors for adding to and modifying it. Ethiopianist revisions of history served to promote racial pride and form the basis for uplift organizations. Marcus Garvey had used just such a popular mythical Africa to inspire UNIA members. His reliance on the

---

19 "JESUS WAS A NEGRO BY BLOOD," *CD*, 2 February 1929; "Negro Universal King," *CD*, 17 March 1928.

20 Marcus Garvey, "Lesson 1: Intelligence, Education, Universal Knowledge and How to Get It" in *Marcus Garvey: Life and Lessons*, ed. Robert S. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 196; Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement*, 53-4.

21 Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement*, 53-4.

ancient Africa of the Egyptians and Ethiopians served to draw on blacks' confidence and race pride; Garvey's depiction of modern Africa as backward and savage focused African-American energies toward the goal of rehabilitating the continent and black America. Having no choice but to buy into white representations of modern Africa, many blacks saw themselves as a bridge between Western Civilization and supposedly-uncivilized contemporary Africa. Many other more obscure African Americans self-published books and pamphlets containing revisionist histories of the continent which described Ethiopia and Egypt as sources of ancient knowledge that was the rightful property of African Americans, and would set blacks free were they to rediscover it.[22]

Popular black perceptions of Africa and the non-white world were perpetuated by other forms of mass communication such as the black press. Even Garvey's nemesis, Robert Abbott, placed a Sphinx on the header of the *Chicago Defender* to remind readers of their noble ancestry. The *Defender* catered to popular Egyptology by proudly reporting on the important archaeological discoveries in Egypt, including King Tutankhamen's tomb, giving detailed descriptions of the treasures unearthed inside. The paper also ran articles describing life in the ancient Nile Valley, attributing many discoveries to Egyptians, some of them less noble than others, in articles such as "Making of Cheese Egyptian Discovery."[23] The *Defender* also published

---

[22] Hickey and Wylie's excellent discussion of this popular intellectual tradition provides examples of works, millenial in tone, written by men presenting themselves as renewers of black culture. One presented himself, like Noble Drew Ali, as an African American who had discovered ancient African wisdom which proved that whites had been lying to blacks about black history for centuries in order to keep them powerless. Hickey and Wylie, *An Enchanting Darkness*, 270-2.

[23] "Making of Cheese Egyptian Discovery," *CD*, 20 February 1926; "First Photos of King Tut Arrive in United States," *CD*, 6 March 1926; "Tut's Tomb Continues to Reveal New Wonders," *CD*, 4 December 1926.

stories which mocked modern Africans as savages. For instance, a *Defender* report reviewing a 1928 film starring Josephine Baker as an African girl stated, "She is seen there at first as a little savage girl, climbing trees and gradually civilizing herself to the contact of white men. She comes to Paris, where her success in the music hall makes her famous."[24] The *Defender* reserved such negative characterizations for Sub-Saharan Africans, North Africans being exempted as racially diverse inheritors of the ancient greatness of Egypt and Islam.

Many members of respectable black society adhered to these views or some part of them having never visited Africa themselves. And in an age before colour television, many Americans, black and white, drew their perceptions of the physical characteristics of various nationalities and ethnic groups from the few black and white images found in the local newspaper. The *Chicago Defender* was a key molder of black perceptions of non-Americans through its foreign news coverage, and in particular, through the paper's back page called "The Week in Pictures." Taking advantage of whatever racial diversity existed in African, North African and Middle Eastern countries, the *Defender* printed photos which presented the reader with black people from Arab and Muslim African countries. A large photo of the turbaned Sultan of Zanzibar, for instance, reinforced the popular perception that much of Africa was Muslim. These perceptions were both a reflection of and a result of a steady stream of articles documenting the spread of Islam in Africa and the United States which were widely circulated in the *Defender*, *The*

---

[24] "Rise of Josephine Baker Not Possible in America," *CD*, 4 February 1928.

Messenger, published by black union leaders A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen, and Marcus Garvey's *Negro World*.[25]

A parallel and interrelated popular black tradition characterized Islam as an ancient and native African religion. This black perception of Islam served as a bridge between classical and modern Africa, where Islam was thought to be spreading rapidly, having nonetheless already existed for centuries. Naturally the *Defender* and other black publications were unable to tutor readers on all the intricacies of Muslim theology, the Qur'an, or the countless variations of Islamic belief and practice around the world. The limited information these sources did provide catered to the political and spiritual concerns of African Americans. These periodicals described Islam as a monotheistic African religion which "knows no colorline."[26] Most blacks probably knew no more about the religion than this, simply having a vague perception that the religion was one in which blacks were first class members and authentic interpreters. However, a large portion of these articles portrayed Islam as militantly anti-Christian and as spreading at an alarming pace through previously Christian parts of Africa and America. Such reports likely pleased both black Christians suspicious of the religion, and blacks

---

[25] One story, for example, presenteed four black Muslim men from Aden who stated they had proof of their direct "descent from Abraham through Ishmael, his son, and Hagar, his wife, commonly known as the forerunner of the Ethiopian race." The story goes on to claim that these men were Arabs which confirms "the old opinion of a double origin of the Arab race." "Trace Ancestry to Mighty Sampson," *CD*, 1 June 1929; "Off For London - High highness, the Sultan of Zanzibar," *CD*, 1 June 1929; "Mohammedan Religion Spreads to Africa," *CD*, 28 April 1928; "Endanger Christianity in Africa," *CD*, 20 October 1928; A. T. Hoffert, "Moslem Propaganda: The Hand of Islam Stretches Out to Aframerica," *The Messenger* 9, no. 5 (May 1927), 141, 160; J. A. Rogers, "Bilal ibn Rahab -- Warrior Priest," *The Messenger* 9, no. 6 (June, 1927), 214; Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement*, 180; Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 399.

[26] J. A. Rogers, "Bilal ibn Rahab -- Warrior Priest," 213-14.

sympathetic to Islam and disillusioned with Christianity, often perceived to be the religion of whites.[27]

No doubt benefiting from Islam's good reputation among many blacks, a few Indian Ahmadiyya Muslim missionaries set up shop on South Wabash Avenue, in the heart of Chicago's black community in the early 1920s in order to proselytize among American blacks. By 1926 they were taking out ads on the *Defender's* religion and spirituality page which encouraged blacks to come to their Sunday services and learn about the religion "of your forefathers."[28] The Islam they presented to the South Side in their tracts and newspaper was similarly simplified to appeal to black interests. In articles such as "Crescent or Cross? A Negro May Aspire to Any Position under Islam without Discrimination," the Ahmadiyya advertised an Islam which ignored the violence, slave holding, and racial conflict that is to be found in Muslim history, or in any thirteen-hundred-year stretch of the human past.[29] These missionaries were also active in Garvey's UNIA, where they found sympathetic pan-Africanists who also saw potential in Islam for unity among all non-whites around the world. Further, the Ahmadiyya walked the streets dressed in robes and turbans, reinforcing cliché images of Muslims from the black press. These missionaries were only very modestly successful. One missionary complained in the 1950s that he felt his movement had not been able to

---

[27] "Changing Religions," *CD*, 14 May 1927; "Endanger Christianity in Africa," *CD*, 20 October 1928; "Sees Islam Making Bid for Converts," *CD*, 14 May 1927.

[28] "Islam of Mohammedism Means the Religion of Peace," *CD*, 23 October 1926.

[29] Richard Brent Turner, "The Ahmadiyya Mission to Blacks in the United States in the 1920s," *Journal of Religious Thought* 44, no. 2 (Winter/Spring 1988), 61; Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience*, (Bloomington and Indianpolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 126-130; Charles Braden, "Moslem Missionaries in America," *Religion in Life* 28, no. 3 (Summer 1959), 338.

provide for black converts' social and political needs, or accommodate their militance.[30]

Other African American religions also subscribed to pan-racial ideologies which saw all races as emanating from the same source. The Chicago Bahá'í community is a particularly striking example of an integrated American religion since this movement appears to have actually put its goals of uniting humankind under one faith into practice. Though official histories of the religion give little indication, Robert Stockman and the dozens of contemporary *Defender* articles regarding the Bahá'ís show that elite blacks admired this alternative religious movement, some joining themselves. For instance, a prominent African American, Louis Gregory, graduate of Fisk and Howard universities, member of the National Baptist Assembly, was elected in 1927 to the national assembly of Bahá'ís in Canada and the United States. He had married a white Bahá'í woman in 1912 with the blessing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, successor to the religion's founder, Bahá'ulláh. The faith originated in nineteenth-century Iran and has as its central tenets the unity of humankind and the role of Bahá'ulláh as the messiah predicted by Muslim, Zoroastrian and Jewish prophets. Bahá'í leaders in the United States constantly emphasized the religion's ideal of racial unity, and the belief in a single spiritual truth which could be found in all the world's religions.[31]

---

30 "From a Moslem," *CD*, 4 June 1927; "East Indian Tells of Native Religion," *CD*, 3 August 1929; Turner, "Islam in the African-American Experience," 126-30. Tony Martin has shown that UNIA leadership flirted with the idea of endorsing Islam as the official faith of the movement, however, Garvey never settled on one religion believing he might alienate half his potential supporters by choosing either Christianity or Islam. Martin, *Race First*, 74-76; Braden, "Islam in America," 314.

31 "Elect Louis Gregory to B'hai Board," *CD*, 25 June 1927; Robert H. Stockman, "The American Bahá'í Community in the Nineties," in *America's Alternative Religions*, ed. Timothy Miller (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), 243-5.

No doubt, the Bahá'ís got so much favorable exposure from the *Defender* due to their highly intellectual membership and their attempts at spiritual integration. Indeed, the *Defender* approved of any religion which promoted racial equality and black elite values, and often criticized those which did not.[32] The Bahá'ís in Chicago may have developed an integrated membership and their positive public image because only about five per cent of their congregation was African-American, which in Chicago meant only about fifty black Bahá'ís. Further, this movement catered to college-educated and relatively wealthy African-American Chicagoans, making no inroads with Southern migrants who would have rejected the sub-culture of this white upper-middle-class movement. As a result, the Bahá'ís were not sullied in the eyes of respectable elites by association with migrants or the popular storefront Spiritualist churches which actually shared many of the Bahá'ís' beliefs.[33]

The African-American fraternal tradition functioned as yet another black adoption and interpretation of Eastern culture that today may appear

---

[32] One *Defender* article angrily denounced a segregated New Thought organization known as Unity Fellowship of Practical Christianity which opened its doors on the South Side of Chicago, but relegated blacks to the back rows. The paper insisted "Members of the Race are so incensed at the "Unity Fellowship" that they have even threatened to beat up any dark-skinned religionists who accept the insult to the Race and attend the "Jim Crow" sessions that have been arranged." "'Unity' Gives Lord's Work a Black Eye," *CD*, 5 February 1927.

[33] The *Defender* reported on the activities of Chicago's Bahá'ís more than any other black religious group, other than the established Baptist and Methodist churches. In particular they published a three part series entitled "What is a Bahá'í," which described the religion in great detail and very favorably. This community was no utopia though. One Defender article repeated the patronizing official attitude of Bahá'í leadership regarding the duty of each race, "justice and cordiality upon the part of whites, and gratitude on the part of the Colored race for participation in a civilization which has permitted them to develop with a rapidity scarcely paralleled in history." "Elect Louis Gregory to B'hai Board," *CD*, 25 June 1927; "What is a Bahá'í?" *CD*, 29 May, 1926, I, 4; "What is a Bahá'í?" *CD*, 10 July 1926; "What is a Bahá'í?" *CD*, 26 September 1926; Stockman, "American Bahá'í Community," 243-5.

crassly Orientalist, but in its time was a legitimate expression of black conceptions of history. In the nineteenth-century, Masons and members of other secret societies became enthralled with Egypt, which they saw as the original source of Masonic mysteries and wisdom. Early twentieth-century archaeological discoveries prompted a popular fascination inspiring amateur Egyptologists and Masonic historians to write histories which interpreted the ancient Egyptian past to fit their spiritual needs. The ancient Egyptian aesthetic was perfect for Masons, and particularly Shriners, looking for colorful, dramatic symbols and regalia to display in public parades and demonstrations of fraternal power. Particularly for fraternal orders obsessed with secret ways of communicating ancient knowledge, Egyptian hieroglyphics appeared to hold the world's wisdom in a series of symbols whose strangeness and mystery only increased their appeal.[34] For African Americans who denied that Egypt was culturally separate from the rest of Africa as whites believed, these symbols of ancient truth held extra meaning reminding them of their ancestors' place at the foundations of western civilization.

Many white Americans saw black fraternal orders as an African-American appropriation of a white organizing tradition. It is true that all the black fraternal orders were officially established after those founded by whites, by blacks who saw fraternal orders as a functional and non-threatening way to organize. There is a long tradition of whites seeking to eliminate black counterparts to various fraternal orders by obtaining their charters, or having their use of Masonic symbols or rituals banned by law.

---

[34] David Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century, 1590-1710* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 83; Martin Short, *Inside the Brotherhood: Further Secrets of the Freemasons* (London: Grafton Books, 1989), 72; Loretta J. Williams, *Black Freemasonry and, Middle-Class Realities* (Columbia, & London: University of Missouri Press, 1980), 48-50.

The 1920s was a particularly active time for such court cases with white Masons, Shriners and Pythians challenging their black counterparts in court in a dozen states. The *Defender* carried detailed coverage of the battle between black and white Shriners in Texas over use of Shriner regalia and paraphernalia, for example. A 1918 parade in Houston by the previously unknown-to-whites black Shriners provoked initiation of the court battle by white members of the Ancient Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine. The case lasted six years, finally being settled in United States Supreme Court in 1929 in favor of the black order. While the court did not agree that blacks were the original founders of the order in ancient Egypt, and therefore the authentic holders of Shriner culture in the US, the court did argue that since blacks called their movement the Ancient Arabic *Egyptian* Order of Nobles of the Mystic Shrine they were not attempting to present themselves as agents of the white order. The victory was a matter of great pride to many blacks who saw the court's decision as a sign of their growing status as equal citizens in the country. Black Shriners, most of them Christians, were instructed to celebrate the victory in the traditional Shriner fashion, by giving "thanks to 'Allah' for delivering them from their oppressors."[35] The issue behind the court case was who had the right to manipulate Eastern culture for their own enjoyment and political needs, not authenticity.[36]

---

35 "Secret Order Elated Over Court Fight," *CD*, 22 June 1929.

36 The Rev. W.M. Webb, mentioned above, also preached that King Soloman, Hiram Abif, and the men commissioned to build Soloman's temple were all black. The legend of the building of Soloman's temple, which was reputedly constructed by the first Masons, lies at the very heart of freemasonry, which includes a reenactment of the killing of Hiram Abif as the Third Degree ritual. Webb, who also published through the Fraternal Press of Chicago, obviously represented that strain of black thought which claimed freemasonry as black culture. "Jesus Was a Negro By Blood," *CD*, 2 February 1929; "Texas Lodge Case To Get Final Airing," *CD*, 21 January 1928; "The Text of US Supreme Court Decision in Shrine Case," *CD*, 17 August 1929; Albert Gallatin Mackey, *The History of Freemasonry: Its Legendary Origins*(1882, repr. New

The public life of black Chicago was dominated by these fraternal orders as well as churches and social clubs whose conclaves or conventions were the organizations' yearly highlight. These gatherings brought members from around the country to Chicago. Conclaves usually included elections for new officials, dances, banquets and a parade which presented Chicago blacks with an opportunity to show off and entertain the neighborhood. Even black Catholics were known to hold "Eucharistic Congresses," which included a procession complete with uniformed honor guard, through the South Side of Chicago as a demonstration of pride and unity. Chicago's parade tradition was a privileged form of communication between blacks, and between blacks and whites. Those events thought to be embarrassing to blacks or threatening to whites were refused parade licenses, broken up by the police, or ridiculed by black leaders and audiences. Thus, to gather the members of an organization or religious group and parade unopposed through the South Side, particularly if the *Defender* reported on the event favorably, was a sign of acceptance. Although many whites found black parades humorous, participants knew these events were valuable public relations and photo opportunities. Parades were also a preeminent site for black expressions of respectability because they featured blacks dressed in their best clothes and organized into clubs and organizations which promoted respectable behavior, black pride, and American patriotism.[37]

Fraternal conclaves seemed to be the most colorful and well funded such public events, often including baseball tournaments or boxing matches in the

---

York: Gramercy Books, 1996), 417; W. Kirk MacNulty, *Freemasonry: A Journey through Ritual and Symbol.* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 28-9; Williams, *Black Freemasonry*, 87.

[37] "Eucharistic Congress," *CD*, 26 June 1926; Shane White, "'It Was a Proud Day': African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1741-1834" *Journal of American History* 81, no. 1 (June 1994), 28-50.

festivities. Black Masonic and Shriner parades in particular retained elements of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century processions blacks used to demonstrate citizenship, organization, and ownership of public space. For instance, the contemporary (and still extant) military drills competitions included in black parades were remnants of the "General Training" marching rituals of Northern slaves, which Shane White has surmised black slaves performed to mock white militias.[38] By the twentieth-century black parades included drills teams which marched solemnly in well-practiced unison during fraternal and other parades, perhaps as a demonstration of black discipline and citizenship. Fraternal parades also often employed comic entertainment by men dressed as mock Arabs or Persians. As each fraternity attempted to outdo each other such entertainment became more elaborate and vivid. One Shriner parade in Boston included a participant calling himself "Sahara Lizzie" who "resplendent in yellow, purple, blue and orange with weird sleeve decoration . . . performed a wild dance along the route to the music of his own tambourine."[39] The *Defender* approvingly reported on another parade, "The gaiety of 10,000 Desert Sons in 'whoopee' colors and a bedlam of noise will give the annual session of their order a real Oriental aspect . . . The Shrine Jesters . . .will sing and rejoice and give praise to 'Allah.'"[40]

Although black Masons and Shriners did seriously contend that their orders originated in Egypt and Arabia, the perceived lands of their ancestors, they nonetheless mocked such lands with popular Orientalist representations

---

[38] White, "It Was A Proud Day," 29, 46.

[39] "Shriners End Fine Session in Bean City," *CD*, 4 September 1926; "100,000 View Pythians in Big Parade," *CD*, 20 August 1927; "Masons Will Hear Leaders Discuss Fraternal Issues," *CD*, 12 January 1929; White, "It Was a Proud Day," 30.

[40] "Shriners to Get Welcome in Big Style," *CD*, 29 June 1929.

of this heritage. The black elite had ridiculed similar parades and colorful costumes used by Marcus Garvey and the UNIA, one observer calling him a "clown strutting around in gaudy uniforms . . . who led big parades of ignorant people down the street selling pie in the sky."[41] However, fraternal orders were permitted such public displays because they represented respectable black society. Further, their depictions of Arabs and Persians used established images and caricatures found in both black and white fraternal sub-cultures. Indeed blacks had fought all the way to the United States Supreme Court for the right to do so, perhaps believing that this culture was theirs to represent in public, even if in jest. Garvey, on the other hand, had appeared to African-American leaders as a pretender to black leadership and elite circles. Moreover, he used no mock Arabs in his parades, dressing himself rather as the "Provisional President" of Africa, and dressing UNIA members in pseudo-royal garb which had no tradition of use among respectable black society. Thus his American rivals perceived Garvey's self-styled African identity and colourful parades as a function of his ego and ridiculed him accordingly.[42]

In Chicago some parades by blacks dressed in exotic garb also had a sinister connotation. During 1920 the city had been the site of a flag-burning demonstration by members of group known as the Abyssinian Movement. The militant leader of the Abyssinians, Grover Cleveland Redding, like Garvey, advocated the migration of blacks to Africa. However, his rejection of his American citizenship was overt and aggressive. Thus, dressed in the garb of a supposed Abyssinian prince and riding a white horse, he, or one of the Abyssinians participating in the procession, shot a police officer who attempted to stop the flag burning. Two further whites were killed in the riot

---

[41] Levine, "Marcus Garvey," 121.

[42] Ibid., 121; Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations*, 116-119.

that followed. Thus, white Chicago and respectable black Chicago were wary of unknown African-costumed agitators who marched in the streets independent of the established fraternal or religious conclave traditions.[43]

African-American historical revisionism was expressed not only in black-authored books, newspapers, and fraternal sub-culture, but also in the all pervasive culture of popular magic. The practice of magic is a system of rituals controlling the mysterious blind forces of the universe which affect human existence, and can be seen at work in the Renaissance Freemasonic tradition, astrology, and in the American South and Caribbean, voodoo. All these belief systems came together in urban America to form a complex parallel system of spiritual belief and practice which existed side by side with belief in God and church attendance. African-American purveyors of magical objects, powers and wisdom built upon the perception that ancient blacks, who had built the foundations of Western Civilization in Egypt, had also created magic there. Thus many African Americans believed American blacks were the most authentic suppliers and interpreters of magic in the modern world.

Though usually characterized as particularly attractive to supposedly gullible Southern blacks, especially women, African-American popular magic was explored by blacks from every background and walk of life. Plenty of evidence of African-American magic can be found in the countless advertisements for lucky charms, books of secret wisdom, psychic readings and magic healing which appeared in black newspapers. Although many well-to-do and educated 'respectable' blacks disapproved of such advertisements and the men and women who placed them, the truth was that such advertising formed a key part of advertising revenue for black-owned papers including the *Chicago Defender*. Nonetheless, the *Defender* often

---

[43] Bontemps and Conroy, *Anyplace But Here*, 204-5.

printed unflattering stories of allegedly gullible customers and swindling charlatan "advisors," with headlines such as "Jail Voodoo Doctor When Potions Fail."[44] Nonetheless, belief in magic and the abilities of those who claimed to know ancient secrets or have psychic powers flourished. In fact, the many advertisements and news articles found in black newspapers merely hint at the huge industry surrounding popular magic mysticism that existed in black neighborhoods.[45]

African-Americans had access to a diverse selection of magical products and information which could solve just about any problem. Advertisements for lucky objects such as rings, "lodestones," incense, candles, oils or powders claimed these products could be used to coerce the unseen forces of the universe to do one's bidding. These products were often associated with ancient Egypt, Arabia or "Hindoo" lands. For instance, the "Mystic Arabian Sheik Ring" was touted as an "ancient Arabian Symbol of good luck in love, games and business."[46] Another advertisement exclaimed, "Success! Success! Egyptian Stock Scarab kills hard luck, wins in games of chance and love, and lost friends found. . . Delays are dangerous."[47] The sellers of magical objects further authenticated their wares by billing themselves as an Eastern "mystic," "seer," "occultist," or "metaphysician." Some sellers were no doubt

---

[44] "Jail Voodoo Doctor When Potions Fail," *CD*, 21 April 1928.

[45] Roi Ottley, *New World A-Coming* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943), 280; Loudell F. Snow, "Mail Order Magic: The Commercial Exploitation of Folk Belief" *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 16, no. 1-2 (1979): 44-74. This detailed essay sheds much light on the modern business of magic among African Americans, including the existence of intriguing products such as the "'Evil Jinx Removing' candle" and "Inflammitory Confusion Bath Oil." However, Snow does see all customers as victims and all vendors as charlatans, not an accurate understanding of this business. Some sellers strongly believe their own claims, while some customers purchase candles etc. as a recreation, just as one might read the horoscope in the newspaper, or the message in a fortune cookie.

[46] "The Sheik, For Luck in Love," *CD*, 24 September 1927.

[47] "Success! Success!" *CD*, 4 June 1927.

also opportunists who knew their claims to be fraudulent. However, many of the charm and candle vendors must have been believers who saw personal financial gain as evidence of their own magical powers and the truth of their teachings and advice. Similarly the stereotype of the gullible Southern black woman as victim of such entrepreneurs is misleading since it ignores the many blacks, male and female, Northern and Southern born who felt magical objects had worked for them and who patronized these mail-order businesses.

Many such magicians were women who operated black Spiritualist churches in storefronts and private homes. The Spiritualist churches were the inheritors of a diverse set of religious influences including Catholicism, Southern hoodoo, white spiritualism, channeling, and New Thought philosophies. Like the white Spiritualist and New Thought movements, black Spiritualism tended to be the domain of women leaders and existed in parallel with a network of established Christian churches with primarily male leadership. Many African Americans patronized both a black Baptist or Methodist church and a local Spiritualist, seeing no contradiction between seeking God and the manipulation of the blind forces of the universe. Like white Spiritualists, black Spiritualists also perceived themselves to be delving into realms of ancient wisdom and magic which could be found in its purist form in Eastern countries. Thus such "advisors" and "metaphysicians" employed symbols of Egypt, India or Arabia by taking on such names as "Madame Fu Futtam," or naming their churches "Universal Ancient Ethiopian Spiritual Church of Christ," for instance. These symbols were cultural cues which connected these Spiritualists to Eastern sources of wisdom their customers believed to be ancient and true. They also perceived their expertise to be a science based on the rational observation of the unchanging forces of the universe, just as did Christian Scientists and many other New Thought

thinkers. Thus such mystics called their teachings "Divine Science," or "Holiness Science" for example.[48]

Spiritualists presented mysticism and magic in a commercial context, providing clients with advice or charms and rituals to solve personal or professional problems, or to hit it big playing the lottery or gambling. Many recommended lucky numbers to believers or sold "dream books" which could be used to find numerical equivalents to people and events found in one's dreams. Thus a few of these women became major players in Chicago's gambling networks, both advising customers on lucky numbers and earning income by acting as agents for book makers and gambling operations. As a result, some of Chicago's blacks were suspicious of the Spiritualists believing them to be swindlers who preyed on superstitious Southerners. Others perceived these often independent, unmarried, and self-employed women as immoral since they seemed to reject elite African-American morality and 'family values.' Black elites attempted to curtail blacks' patronage of such women advisors whom they felt encouraged white perceptions of blacks as superstitious gamblers who participated in illegal gambling, and of black women as mysterious and immoral.[49]

Nonetheless, blacks from all walks of life found no contradiction between gambling, attendance at Spiritualist services, and status as respectable black Americans. Many respectable African Americans profited from illegal activities, running gambling or bootlegging operations, for example. With so many white Chicagoans demanding their services, many

---

[48] Hans A. Baer, *The Black Spiritual Movement: A Religious Response to Racism* (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 110-52; Claude McKay, *Harlem: Negro Metropolis* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1940), 73-81; Victoria W. Walcott, "The Culture of the Informal Economy: Numbers Runners in Inter-War Black Detroit" *Radical History Review* 69 (1997), 46-75; Walcott, "Mediums, Messages, and Lucky Numbers," 273.

[49] Walcott, "Mediums, Messages, and Lucky Numbers," 273.

chose to ignore the moralizing of other blacks and cash in. The largest grossing business in Chicago's black belt may indeed have been the gambling syndicates, which in the late 1920s employed around six thousand African Americans. Within the numbers racket, men and women were employed collecting and paying out on bets, regulating the drawing of numbers, and paying off police and city officials to look the other way regarding this ostensibly-illegal activity. Such jobs were the only type of white-collar work most African Americans could hope to find in Chicago due to widespread white discrimination against blacks. The vast majority of blacks on the South Side played the numbers, a type of lottery which permeated black communities throughout the country. Many people played daily, placing small bets under one dollar hoping to hit it big and quit a boring job, pay off debts or simply afford life's necessities. Popular culture in urban black communities abounded with tales of men and women who had scored, winning a few hundred dollars and turning their winnings into freedom from debt, a new car, or their own business. These lotteries and betting games created black jobs and circulated money within the community. Thus, in the context of interwar black Chicago, playing the numbers demonstrated respectable self-help.[50]

The African-American men who ran gambling syndicates became exceedingly wealthy, some branching out into bootlegging, drug dealing, nightclubs or other more legitimate businesses. In fact many of the gambling offices ran behind fronts such as groceries, laundries or shoeshine parlors. These syndicate bosses also formed the core of Chicago's black political

---

50 Wolcott, "Culture of the Informal Economy," 46-75; Gosnell, *Negro Politicians*, 122-6; Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 481-4, 490-4; Malcolm X, with Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1964, repr. New York: Balantine Books, 1973), 87-8.

machine, a parallel and complimentary version of Chicago's white machine. These men translated their money into political clout with blacks, promising votes and money to corrupt white police, judges, ward bosses, and even state politicians. Many of these gambling bosses were eminently respected in the community as people who had "made it" by adapting to the white political and economic system in Chicago, while still serving the black community by providing a valued service, and by making high profile donations to African-American charities. Victoria Wolcott has shown that the bulk of respectable black society accepted and patronized the gambling bosses and the entire informal economy. Many perceived these men to be running businesses which, unlike white-owned businesses in black neighborhoods, kept black dollars in black neighborhoods, creating jobs. Blacks even referred to these gambling operations as "banks," since so much more black money was tied up in them than in the few African-American-owned banks. By the late 1920s in Chicago, black entrepreneurs who had made fortunes through gambling and other parts of the informal economy began to be embraced as respectable race leaders by the most cautious and elite voices of respectability, such as the established-church leadership and the *Defender*.[51]

Black Spiritualists brought together not only respectable society and the informal economy, but also popular magic and the more 'respectable' mystical spiritual teachings of Chicago's alternative religions. The de Laurence Company of Chicago catered to Spiritualists and their customers by selling a huge variety of books on both magic and mysticism. A large advertisement placed in the *Defender* in early January, 1930 advertised not only works on magic, but works on "Spiritualism, Clairvoyance, Mediumship,

---

[51] Wolcott, "Culture of the Informal Economy," 65-75; Gosnell, *Negro Politicians*, 130-3.

Healing, Hypnotism, Mind-Reading, . . . New Thought, Mental Telepathy, Theology," "Metaphysical, Theosophical, Astrological" books, and the "Egyptian Book of the Dead." The line between the mystical pursuit of direct knowledge of God, and the coercion of hidden natural forces through magic became blurred in the dense text of this ad. This mail order bookseller also offered blacks books usually associated with elite white mystical and religious movements such as Theosophy and New Thought. The fact that these books were written by whites seemed not to detract from their perceived origins in ancient Egypt or mysterious India. Further, African Americans saw no contradiction between the context of the de Laurence ad, the authenticity of the books it sold, or the act of using the postal system to acquire spiritual knowledge. In a time when New Thought and similar middle and upper-class white religious-mystical movements usually refused black members, the mail provided a way to gain access to the books they published. The mail-order stores and book sellers which produced these advertisements existed within a network of occult and mystical shops, public libraries and personal lending networks in black neighborhoods which functioning as a parallel system of spiritual communication informed by both white mysticism and black popular magic, separate from the church sermon or newsletter, but no less legitimate.[52]

Like black Spiritualists who affected an "Eastern adviser" persona as a code of authenticity, other African Americans took advantage of the lucrative

---

[52] The colorline in New Thought and other American mystical movements is well documented, yet American blacks still adopted and reinterpreted New Thought teachings and ideas. Martin E. Marty, "The Occult Establishment" *Social Research* 37 (1970): 220-1. Father Divine was known to devour New Thought books he found at the local library. Jill Watts, *God, Harlem USA: The Father Divine Story* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 60; Hakim Bey, "Moorish Mail-Order Mysticism," *Moorish Science Monitor* 7(2, Autumn 1994): found at http://www.hermetic.com/bey/mailord.html; accessed August 20, 1998; Internet.

industry surrounding the selling of financial, economic, or spiritual 'get-rich-quick' schemes by fashioning themselves as advisors, mystics or yogis to both blacks and whites. Cleverly turning white perceptions of race around, a small but significant number of African Americans made their color an advantage in white society by posing as Turkish, African, Indian, or Arab teachers. The disguise was a performance meant to convey a sense of authenticity to customers. The *Defender* reported on a well-known Turkish coffee vendor in London known as Abd El Mustaph Bey Mohammed Allah Kismet, "He raises one hand to Allah and the customers as he approaches a table, and then begins talking Turkish, or perhaps it is Indian. 'Me put 'em plate here,' mumbles the coffee vender, 'you take 'em coffee, very fine Turkish coffee."[53] In spite of the red fez he sported, the *Defender* reported that this man was soon exposed as "George", a black American, when he accidentally slipped out of his "Turkish" accent into an Southern-American one.[54] Another *Defender* article reported that some of Chicago's white elite had met an Egyptian psychic at the home of philanthropist and one-time director of the Sears & Roebuck Company, Julius Rosenwald. Present at the party were academics from the University of Chicago, meat-packing magnate Julius Swift and his wife, and Ascandar Khallah Bey, "Egyptian telepathist." Dr. Louis Mann, a prominent Rabbi and University of Chicago scholar in the faculty of Oriental Languages, described later how he had been amazed by the psychic abilities of the Egyptian guest whose demonstration had been so compelling that Mann claimed to have become a believer in mental telepathy. Indeed,

---

53 "Turkish Coffee Vender Turns Out as American," *CD*, 30 June 1928.

54 Ibid.; Harlem was also known as a place of business for a large number of "African conjure men," some of whom were dragged into court charged with "using magic to drive the spirits away." See for example "He Puts Out Evil Spirits at $75 Each, The Judge Puts 'Em Out for $1,500," *CD*, 27 March 1926.

many interwar Americans held strong beliefs in psychic phenomena and such "Eastern" advisors in addition to traditional religious beliefs.[55]

In some cases academics have commented on African Americans' attempts to reconstruct their identities by posing as natives of other countries. The black sociologist E. Franklin Frazier wrote in his work, *The Negro Family in Chicago*, about the experiences of a woman migrant to the North who unexpectedly ran into an acquaintance from the South on the street one afternoon in Chicago,

> I was walking down Michigan Avenue when I ran into a man with an East Indian turban, black English walking coat and grey striped trousers. He was in company with a white woman who made a rather poor appearance. I immediately recognized him as a member of a Negro family who lived in an adjoining county to the one I lived in Mississippi. . . this boy was always very handsome with thick, black glossy curly hair. His family was of moderate circumstances. He had been educated at a college in Georgia. As both of us were standing waiting for the traffic, I touched his arm and said to him, "It seems to me that I have seen you before." He answered with an accent "Beeg pardon but Ladee you are meestaken, I do not know you." The white woman with him became interested immediately. . . I said to him, "William, what does this mean?" Immediately he dropped into his usual manner of talking and half whispered, "Give me your telephone number." I told him no, because I could not let any one as dark as he visit me on the North Side.[56]

Frazier commented that, "Strange transformations take place in the personality of the Negroes in the city," and that this man had "lost his identity."[57] Of course, this man probably felt he had lost only the stigma of being a black from Mississippi. Presenting himself as an Indian-national in the US, he was manipulating the vague perception of the average American of how someone from India looked and sounded. Ironically, this man's self-

---

[55] "Says He Believes Telepathy Is Real," *CD*, 1 January 1927.

[56] Chicago informant in E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932), 83.

[57] Ibid.

transformation was not sufficient to allow him to visit the woman informant in the white neighborhood on the north side of Chicago where she and her light-skinned black husband lived by passing as whites.

The fact remained that migrants from the South were expected by elite blacks and white Chicago to transform themselves from supposed Southern country bumpkins into law abiding, employed and 'respectable' Northern citizens. However, most migrants agreed that simply becoming respectable was no guarantee of equal treatment in the North, thus they had nothing to lose by exploring other identities except perhaps approval from some fellow African Americans. Further, those New Thought, Theosophical and other American mystical movements established by and catering to wealthy whites were notoriously hostile to blacks, in spite of their teachings of the unity of mankind and karmic justice. At the same time these white alternative religionists, and many of their black counterparts, regularly employed mystics and lecturers from India and Egypt who toured the US speaking in meeting halls and private households. Certain African Americans, usually men, took matters into their own hands and crossed this mystical colorline by posing as healers and teachers of Eastern religions to these same whites.[58]

Often such 'Eastern" mystics and teachers, including those actually from Asia or Africa, were brought up on charges of theft, fraud or adultery, as had happened to one of the Ahmadiyya missionaries operating on Wabash Ave. The *Defender's* editors were fond of exposing such men with headlines like "Ali's Mysticism Didn't Foretell Prison Term." These reports followed a common pattern. A "Yogi," "master" or "adept" is found to be bilking believers of thousands of dollars through allegedly false healing or fake religious

---

[58] On the industry surrounding Eastern mystics in the US see for example "Indian Savant Honored by Mrs. Harrison Gaines," *CD*, 4 Aug, 1928.

teachings. Usually nabbed at his luxurious apartment with a woman - often another man's wife - he is arrested as a fraud and charged with a series of offenses. For instance, one mystic, "Swami Yoganando" who ran a "cult" in Los Angeles was charged with having "influenced more than 200 Miami women to pay him $35 each for lessons in sex consciousness."[59] More often than not the "victims" were female, women being perceived to be particularly gullible to these exotic swindlers. Indeed, control over female sexuality, both black and white, seemed to be the real issue behind these arrests, rather than fraud or theft. No doubt most respectable blacks also resented these perceived-charlatans because they appeared to be rejecting respectable morality and their identities as American citizens. Respectable African Americans from every walk of life perceived such attempts to affect an exotic persona in order to supposedly swindle women for money or sex as reinforcing white perceptions of black women as unchaste and gullible, and of black men as dishonest and sexually insatiable. Due to such news stories, any man presenting himself as an Eastern mystic in an American city during the interwar period could be looked upon with great suspicion. Yet, while seemingly ridiculous, attempts by black men to pass as Egyptians or Indians were meant to exempt them from both the criticism of the black community and the restrictions imposed by whites, as well as convey authenticity and wisdom to potential converts and followers.[60]

For the *Defender* and much of respectable black society, approval of alternative religious groups hinged on perceived spiritual authenticity, or lack thereof. The paper deemed alternative religions which catered to elite,

---

[59] "East Indian Mystic Sets Miami Astir," *CD*, 11 February 1929. See also for example, "White Widow Aims To Wed Cult Leader," *CD*, 18 February 1928; "Indian Prince Tells His Side Of Love Suit," *CD*, 12 January 1929.

[60] Martin E. Marty, "The Occult Establishment," 220-1.

educated African Americans, and advocated white middle-class morality and modes of behavior as spiritually sincere and authentic. Those alternative religions which appealed primarily to respectable poor Southerners, and which were associated with the street cultures of the informal economy, the storefront churches or popular magic, the *Defender* branded as inauthentic money-making operations. The editors rejected such groups by publicly humiliating and "exposing" the leader's teachings as a façade behind which stood evil plans to bilk customers and facilitate immoral conduct with young girls. Sometimes these charges appeared to have no substance, only being fabricated since such accusations were an established method of shaming such religionists.

The *Defender's* campaign against the Ever Live and Never Die Church is a case in point. In February, 1926 seven members of this group of African-American men and women calling themselves the Black Jews were arrested by federal agents investigating seventy alleged cases of "immorality" and contravention of the White Slave Act. The Jews' prophet, Elder W. Roberson, told investigators he was 104 years old, was a direct descendant of King Solomon (considered by the group to have been black) and was Jesus Christ. The Black Jews' teachings were akin to many of the African-American Spiritualist churches' and to the foundational myths of black fraternal orders such as the Shriners, which saw Bible-age folk and the ancient Egyptians as blacks' ancestors. Ignoring the distinct possibility the Jews were being brought up groundless charges, the *Defender* shamed the movement, calling it the "daring love cult." The paper reported that when arrested, "All gave fantastic Hebrew names as aliases and were driven from the dives dressed in the outlandish costuming of their order, with skull caps covering men's

heads."[61] Claiming the prophet, Edgar Roberson, owned a "harem" of teenage girls, the *Defender* described rumors that the "sultan of the love kingdom" had formed "sheik schools" to train a crew of "handsome, well educated youths who court the daughters of wealthy Harlem residents." The group was also accused by a woman Deacon of Harlem's prestigious St. John's African Methodist Episcopal Church, "once a 'slave' in Roberson's flock," of engaging witches who held voodoo rites and abused children in "its medieval torture chambers."[62] The *Defender's* reports were so sensational as to be ludicrous. However, the paper's reference to "wealthy Harlem residents" and the woman Deacon showed *Defender* staff writers perceived the Black Jews' real victim to be elite black respectability.[63] Indeed, in this way the paper was bowing to white middle-class and black elite understandings of morality and sexuality which assumed women to be chaste and incapable of prostitution unless coerced. Yet in contrast to whites, the *Defender* extended Progressive conceptions of feminine sexuality and "white slavery" to African-American women also. The paper thus castigated and humiliated the Black Jews, black men who appeared to be challenging such understandings of black femininity, in order to destroy whatever credibility the movement had had.

These elite voices of respectability found among black newspaper publishers and established church leadership dominated African-American

---

61 "Love Cult Raided; Free Girl Slaves," *CD*, 20 February 1926.

62 "New Horrors Bared Among 'Black Jews'," *CD*, 17 July 1926.

63 Abbott's newspaper also humiliated popular faith healer Daddy Grace, and the many voodoo doctors and Eastern mystics, with accusations of selling fake healing for considerable profit, and/or bamboozling innocent black women for immoral purposes. Even the Ahmadiyya missionaries on Wabash Avenue who really were Muslims and Indians were sullied by an attack by the *Defender*, being accused of swindling believers with fake healing. "Converts of 'Healer' in Street War," *CD*, 18 September 1926; "Religious Fanatics Storm Jail to Free 'Prophet'," *CD*, 12 June 1926; "'Messiah' of Love Cult to Face Girl Accusers," *CD*, 13 March 1926; "'Messiah' of Love Cult Sent to Atlanta Prison," *CD*, 29 May 1926; "Arrest Hindu 'Doctor' for Healing Men," *CD*, 6 August 1927.

public discourse in interwar Chicago. However, they did not define respectability for the vast majority of Southern blacks who saw Chicago as a place where they could exercise their rights as American citizens. Having nothing to gain from bowing to white opinion, they experimented with political participation, black nationalist and community uplift organizations, and new religious movements which catered to Southerners' militance. These respectable working-class African Americans often enraged elite blacks and irritated the police in expressing this militance through acts of civil disobedience or rejection of white middle-class values. Southerners perceived the informal economy, storefront churches, and the UNIA as vehicles through which they could finally express themselves as Americans, without fear of the repression they had experienced in the South. Most perceived it to be the personal responsibility of each black American to help advance blacks' position in the United States by contributing to the collective work of community uplift.

For an aspiring religious leader like Noble Drew Ali the stakes could be very high in Chicago. The city's religious entrepreneurs had access to a large pool of potential converts, energetic fund-raisers and missionaries who built multi-city networks of storefront assemblies around the country. Such converts came from the mainstream of black society consisting of respectable working African Americans who were attracted by Ali's radical revisions of black history and his conception of Moorish-American identity. Yet the impatient activism which was crucial to blacks' organizational energy and which directed them to Ali's movement, also stood in the way of Ali's ambitions to lead a high-brow mystical movement akin to the Bahá'ís. In order to avoid harassment by the state and black-elites, Ali would have to harness this militance in order to appeal to conservative black elites, like Robert Abbott,

who could make or break his movement. Like Noble Drew Ali, most of Chicago's blacks navigated a course which vacillated between the two often conflicting poles of respectable self-help and militant patriotism.

Chapter Two: Moorish Science at Work, 1925-1929

Noble Drew Ali arrived in Chicago in 1925, turbaned and brightly gowned, calling himself a prophet of Islam, to contend with rival religions, the judgmental *Defender*, and a largely skeptical public. Eventually he too was publicly shamed by the *Defender* as the Black Jews and many "Eastern" spiritual advisors had been. In the meantime Ali had a difficult task ahead of him. Being a member of the mainstream of respectable African-American society, the prophet was an outsider to privileged elite circles among respectable black Chicago. He had no newspaper, no pulpit, no wealthy patrons to help him spread his message and begin the work of "uplifting fallen humanity."[1] Rather, he started from scratch, preaching from street corners eventually gaining fifteen temples and a few thousand followers, his own newspaper, and some wealthy and politically powerful African American supporters. As such, the story of the rise of the Moorish Science Temple serves as a case study of many similar popular religious movements in interwar urban black America. Like Ali they needed the money and influence of the community's wealthy and powerful, the blessing of elite voices, as well as the mass support of men and women from the mainstream of respectable society to fill the ranks and do the daily work of building and running a religious movement. Gaining the people and money necessary for success sometimes required compromising religious principles and acquiescence to the demands of a diverse group of supporters. Divisions resulting from such compromises ultimately destroyed Noble Drew Ali, but were impossible to avoid for a prophet

---

[1] Noble Drew Ali, *Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple* (Chicago: n.p., 1927), 60.

seeking to build a movement on both the militance of working-class respectable society and the political and financial assets of the black elite.

Like many prophets before him, Noble Drew Ali shrouded his early life in mystery. As a result, we are now left to piece together the years before his 1925 appearance in Chicago largely from oral histories provided by his followers. Ali was probably born Timothy Drew on January 8, 1886 in Sampson County, North Carolina.[2] It seems likely that as a young man he migrated to the northern US with the many African-American men of his generation who found employment on one of the major railway lines. His followers in the early 1940s claimed he had been an expressman on the trains. Indeed, by 1910, over 100,000 black men were employed in the industry, some building tracks, some as porters, waiters or other service staff. Therefore, unlike many other Southern migrants who were known to have broken out into song or prayer in celebration of crossing into a northern state, Ali was one of those relatively well-traveled and worldly Southerners who moved back and forth between North and South many times.[3]

Like many of the blacks who saw the conditions promoting their migration north as an opportunity from God, Noble Drew Ali too may have seen his travels as part of a divine plan. There is no question he felt God was

---

[2] January 8 may not be Ali's true birth date; however, it is the day on which Moorish Americans have been celebrating his birth since the late 1920s. "Birthday of Moorish Leader is Celebrated," *Chicago Defender*, 12 January 1928, hereafter *CD*; Noble Drew Ali, "Koran Questions for Moorish Children," reprinted in Samuel M. Zwemer, "A Moorish Temple Catechism," *Moslem World* 32 (1942): 56; Adib Rashad, *Islam, Black Nationalism, and Slavery: A Detailed History* (Beltsville, Maryland: Writers' Inc., 1995), 166.

[3] More recently some have said Ali joined the prestigious Pullman Porters union in 1910; however, this fact may simply be an embellishment provided by devoted believers. Rashad, *Islam, Black Nationalism, and Slavery*, 166; Milton C. Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land: African-American Religion and the Great Migration* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 41; James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 74,113.

having a hand in his life, though it is difficult to say with certainty why Ali's early life led him to experience a revelation from God. But his teachings show a very sharp awareness of the injustices suffered by blacks all over the US. Even living in the North, with the opportunities it provided, Ali would have been aware that blacks were given only the lowest paying jobs, were forced to live in crowded and segregated parts of town, and could still suffer violent attacks by whites.[4] However, an awareness of the inferior status of African Americans was something all blacks shared. Perhaps, Ali felt disconnected from others due to the transience of his life on the trains and did not have the support network enjoyed by many other African Americans and immigrants to the US who traveled to the Northern homes of friends and family from the South or the old country. Perhaps he spent a period languishing in the lifestyle of many such unattached young train workers who were reputed to spend their off hours gambling and drinking heavily, or in the company of prostitutes, though he could have fallen into such a lifestyle in any urban community. His prudish and stern teachings forbidding all of the above behaviors among his followers show evidence of someone who had perhaps either indulged in such a lifestyle and lived to regret it later, or disapprovingly witnessed others doing so. Perhaps being a deeply religious person Ali managed to live a relatively pure life while still being concerned with the state of those he saw around them, coming to the conclusion he could make a difference.[5]

---

[4] Arthur Huff Faucet, *Black Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Cults in the Urban North* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1944), 41; "Moorish Science Temple", Box 45, Folder 5, Illinois Writers' Project, *The Negro in Illinois*, Vivian G. Harsh Collection, Carter Woodson Regional Library, Chicago, hereafter IWP.

[5] Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 69; Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe, *New Religions as Global Cultures: Making the Human Sacred* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 65 -7; Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 41.

The popular tradition regarding Noble Drew Ali tells of a period of mystical travels in the East before Ali's work on the trains. Peter Wilson summarizes the most colorful version of these stories which was perhaps initiated by Ali himself,

> Drew's father was said to have been of Moorish extraction, his mother of Cherokee ancestry. By the early 1880's, . . ., the Drew family had settled in Newark, New Jersey, where they are said to have met and studied with "Master Adept" Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, who visited the US in the winter of 1882-3. . . According to most authors, Drew knew nothing of any deeper mysteries until his visit to the Orient, sometime before 1912. Aged sixteen he shipped out as a merchant seaman -- some say he took a job as a magician in a traveling circus (he is also said to have worked as a railway expressman) -- and somehow ended up in Egypt. There he met the last priest of an ancient cult of High Magic who took him to the Pyramid of Cheops, led him in blindfolded, and abandoned him. When Drew found his way out unaided the magus recognized him as a potential adept and offered him initiation . . . In Egypt his prophecy manifested as a book, the "Circle Seven Koran," or it might have been in Mecca, where he was somehow empowered by Sultan Abdul Aziz al-Sa'ud, ruler of the city and later of the whole country.[6]

Ali arrived in Chicago armed with this story, or a similar one, to begin building a following. The elements of this version of Ali's past were loaded with significantly more meaning than his past as an railway expressman since this story drew from that strain of African-American popular mysticism and spirituality which many of Chicago's blacks held dear. We find famous late nineteenth-century Persian religious reformer Jamal al-Din al-Afghani described in black Spiritualist/Masonic-style terminology as a "Master Adept." This title may not have displeased Afghani who was known to be a freethinker and Mason.[7] And indeed al-Afghani did visit the US in the 1880s, though he

---

[6] Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Sacred Drift: Essays on the Margins of Islam* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1993),16.

[7] Nikki R. Keddie, *Iran: Religion, Politics and Society* (London: Frank Cass, 1980), 32.

might have been surprised to find his visit recorded in the popular tradition of such a heretical Islamic movement as the Moorish Science Temple. It is difficult to say what kind of religious training Afghani would have theoretically given Ali's parents, since his views seem to have changed according to his audience.[8] Still this connection is probably one that believers perceive as giving the Moors some authenticity and legitimacy as "real" Muslims, with a connection to the rest of the Islamic world.

The link to native Americans in lore surrounding the Moors is intriguing since the theme of Native Americans' perceived spiritual powers and innate ability to understand the natural world has figured prominently in some American New Thought and black Spiritualist traditions. The Cherokee in particular are one of a number of tribes which include descendants of Africans, whites and Native Americans. Ali must have drawn from some popular tradition, still in circulation, which emanated from blacks' knowledge of the racial diversity of some Native American groups. One researcher's informants in 1970s Chicago spoke of a folk tradition among urban blacks which held that Noble Drew Ali's earliest followers in Chicago had been members of a nomadic people of African, Native American and white ancestry who practiced a centuries-old version of Islam derived from contact between Native Americans and Muslim African slaves.[9]

---

[8] Ibid., 30.

[9] Another version of Ali's early history recounted by Peter Wilson argues his Cherokee mother saw Ali's divine potential, but died too soon to nurture it. He was adopted by a "Wicked aunt who beat him, . . ., and once even threw him into a blazing furnace. But Allah saved him." After escaping his Aunt and travelling with "gypsies," Ali received revelation he first tried to ignore, but later embraced. Wilson, *Sacred Drift*, 15-17; Robert S. Ellwood, *Alternative Alters: Unconventional and Eastern Spirituality in America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 103; Hugo P. Leaming, "The Ben Ishmael Tribe: A Fugitive "Nation" of the Old Northwest," *The Ethnic Frontier: Essays in the History of Group Survival in Chicago and the Midwest*, ed. Melvin G. Holli and Peter d'A. Jones (Grand Rapids, Michicgan: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 98-141.

With Noble Drew Ali's lineage authenticated, the tradition further legitimizes Ali by reporting his travels to the East in search of ancient mystical knowledge. Ali demonstrates his divinely guided "adept" powers and the divine essence within himself at the pyramid of Cheops, demonstrating his own innate spiritual powers. Ali is also revealed to be a magician, according to African-American folk wisdom and black Spiritualist lore, a sign of innate ancient Eastern spiritual knowledge. Ali taps into this ancient mystical know-how to escape from the pyramid and to manipulate the natural world through his magic. Although no Moroccans figure into this story, we do find a Saudi prince granting Ali legitimacy. Ali called the Arabs of the Saudi peninsula "Angels" who were the modern day guardians of the holy Islamic city of Mecca founded by African Americans' ancient Moabite ancestors.[10]

The *Chicago Defender* first reported the belief that Ali had proclaimed himself prophet and founded a temple of Moorish Science in Newark, New Jersey sometime during 1913. Other than this account we have no record of Ali's activities until his appearance sometime in 1925 in Chicago, though Works Progress Administration (WPA) state-history researchers reported that when Ali arrived in Chicago he had already established other temples in Pittsburgh and Detroit. In 1925 Ali began to appear in empty lots and street corners on the south side of Chicago preaching his ideas to passers-by. Ali told his listeners he was the prophet of God sent to America to reveal to blacks their true religion, Islam, and their true identities and heritage as Moorish-Americans. The prophet argued African-Americans would only take their place as equal citizens among the country's many ethnic groups when they discovered their noble ancestry and honored it by behaving respectably. Further, he implored African Americans to respect the divine essence within

---

[10] Ali, "Koran Questions," 58.

each of them. He insisted that, with his guidance, each Moorish-American would achieve his or her goals in this life by tapping into the divine within. Indeed, Noble Drew Ali presented ideas which attempted to draw on blacks' basic acceptance of the tenets of the American constitution and belief in their own abilities.[11]

Interwar urban black neighborhoods had a thriving collection of "stepladder," or "jack-leg" preachers, men and women who, like Noble Drew Ali, climbed upon whatever they could find to lecture to crowds on every topic imaginable. Generally, these public speakers were despised by black elites and many "respectable" but conservative blacks. This popular forum naturally attracted those who couldn't find an audience within the established churches or the black political machine, though many were known to graduate to their own storefront churches later. Speakers presented every kind of radical idea, discussions often becoming so heated the police had to be called in to break them up. Standing on a Chicago street corner Ali would simply have been one of many jack-leg preachers disliked and ignored by the *Defender* and much of black Chicago. Apparently Ali made little progress that first year, not acquiring a following of any size until the spring of 1926.[12]

However, Ali must have been an eloquent and forceful speaker with some compelling ideas since, by November of 1926, he had amassed a sizable following and the resources to incorporate his movement in the state of Illinois for a fee of ten dollars. The incorporation papers record Ali as being

---

[11] "Hold Session of Moorish Science Body," *CD*, 20 October 20; "Moorish Science Temple," Box 45, Folder 5, IWP; Bontemps and Conroy, *Anyplace But Here* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966), 205.

[12] Irma. Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900-1930* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 92-94, 109; St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York: Harper and Row, 1945), 629-32.

in the company of four followers, none of whom used their Moorish names. These men, James Lomax, Johnny Reynolds, Eddie Watts and Sammy Rucker were listed as directors of the "Moorish Temple of Science." All five men lived within a few blocks of one another, three of them at the Moorish Science Temple's address. At this early stage Noble Drew Ali was still living in a rooming house with these two "directors," Eddie Watts and Sammy Rucker, and Mr. and Mrs. Mealy-El, also Moors. Believing in the potential of Ali's ideas and movement, they were no doubt glad to get in on the ground floor and participate in leading and expanding the Moorish Science Temple. Indeed, later these same people formed the leadership of the movement, heading temples in cities outside Chicago.[13]

The purpose of the movement was benignly described on the incorporation papers as "To uplift fallen humanity and teach those things necessary to make men and women become better citizens."[14] These words summed the action plan of many such respectable community organizations. Obviously the Moorish Science Temple, though a storefront religious movement at this time, aspired to draw on the same sentiments among blacks as did fraternal orders, established Methodist and Baptist churches, as well as

---

[13] Certificate of Registration for Cook County, Illinois, 29 November, 1926, Box SCM 90-78, Folder 3, in Moorish Science Temple Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, hereafter MST.

[14] Noble Drew Ali had the official name of his movement changed from the Moorish Temple of Science to Moorish Science Temple of America in May 1928, reflecting the movement's growth and the prophet's growing ambition. Certificate of Registration for Cook County, Illinois, 21 May, 1928, Box SCM 90-78, Folder 3, MST. An alternative version of the above document was published in the *Moorish Guide* and stated the movement's purpose as "deriving its power and authority from the Great Koran of Mohammed to propagate the faith and extend the learning and truth of the Great Prophet of ALI in America to appoint and consecrate missionaries of the prophet and to establish the faith of Mohammed in America." No doubt the Moors felt such a statement would have invited suspicion if given to state officials, but was legitimate in the context of the Prophet's newspaper. "Our Authority," *Moorish Guide*, 14 September 1928, Box SCM 90-78, Folder 7, MST, hereafter *MG*.

the city's respectable elite. Further, Ali did not want his organization to appear subversive or dangerous in any way, particularly since, to state officials, it had a peculiar name. In fact on the incorporation form, Noble Drew Ali signed his name and had it recorded by the forms' typist as "Drew Alin," perhaps as an attempt to avoid association with the stereotype of the "Hindoo" cult leader that the name Ali might have provoked.[15] Noble Drew Ali's act of deception at the registry office was one of a series of moves whereby Ali represented his movement as a public uplift organization or fraternal order, rather than a religion. Indeed, as a street preacher and Muslim prophet, Ali had no choice but to temper his background and religious persona with the rhetoric of elite respectability to attract men and women from the mainstream of black society and avoid harassment by the state.[16]

That year the Moors had emerged from anonymity to attract the attention of Chicago, both black and white. Sometime during 1926 or early 1927 Ali began issuing buttons and identity cards to his followers which designated the holder as a Moorish-American and stated the foundations of Moorish Science. This was a natural step for Ali to take since Moors used these cards, like those of Chicago's benevolent associations and fraternities, to

---

[15] Certificate of Registration, 29 November, 1926, MST.

[16] "I Your Prophet," Box 45, Folder 6, IWP. This folder contains a portion of a short story written by one of the African-American writers hired to document black Chicago during the Depression. This work details the conversion of a local woman to Moorish Science in 1925. Eventually she develops romantic feelings for the prophet after his divine presence inspires her to choose the night's winning combination in the numbers game. Though there may be some historically accurate aspects to the story, some of which I have attempted to cull out, it's real value lies in giving an idea of the where early unflattering portrayals of Ali and his movement may have originated. The tale portrays Ali as a distant and manipulative man who appealed to simple, gullible women who find him and his fez mysterious and exotic. This view may have stemmed from similar portrayals of the Moors in the *Chicago Defender* following an outbreak of violence among Moors. This story may also have contributed to the belief Noble Drew Ali was involved in numbers running, like many other Spiritualists.

identify themselves and verify the privileges to which they were entitled. These cards also created a fuller sense of community among Moorish-Americans, identifying the carrier in case of emergency.[17] The text of the card read:

> This is your Nationality and Identification Card for the Moorish Science Temple of America, and birthrights for the Moorish Americans, etc., we honor all the Divine Prophets, Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha and Confucius. May the blessings of the God of our Father Allah, be upon you that carry this card. I do hereby declare that you are a Moslem under the Divine Laws of the Holy Koran of Mecca, Love Truth Peace, Freedom, and Justice. "I AM A CITIZEN OF THE U.S.A."
>
> NOBLE DREW ALI, THE PROPHET, 3603 INDIANA AVE., CHICAGO, ILL.

Three symbols appeared above this text, a star and crescent above the word "Islam," an image of two clasped hands with the word "Unity" above, and on the right a seven with a circle around and the word "Allah" below.[18]

This card made no secret of Ali's belief that he was one in a line of prophets who had all come at different times to bring the same truth to humanity. Presumably, Ali's list of former mystical Christs, "Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, and Confucius" would have made it clear to outsiders that Ali was not advocating some kind of Christianity or "orthodox" Islam, but rather a New Thought/Spiritualist or even Bahá'í-type religion. However, for decades observers, including the local police, were misled by the fact that Ali

---

[17] The *Chicago Defender* asked migrants from the South to carry identification cards because unidentified bodies were piling up in the morgues. Perhaps Ali's Moorish identity cards appealed to some converts since they had recently arrived from the South. With no family or friends in Chicago, any emergency or death might have gone unnoticed by locals and thus unreported to such believers' families in the South or another northern city. Bontemps and Conroy, *Anyplace But Here*, 168.

[18] Mustafa El-Amin has surmised Ali's used the "circle seven" symbol to communicate the completeness of his teachings and their applicability to every part of a person's worldly and spiritual life. Mustafa El-Amin, *Al-Islam, Christianity & Freemasonry* (Jersey City, New Jersey: New Mind Productions, 1985), 114, 150; Faucet, *Black Gods of the Metropolis*, 42-3.

mentioned Jesus on the identity cards and called his religion Islam, and therefore believed Ali's religion was some derivative of Christianity, or even "orthodox" Islam as far as most Chicagoans could tell. Since Ali addressed the text of the cards directly to Moors schooled in Ali's Islamic and Moorish doctrine, it is not surprising readings of the card's message by the uninitiated led to misinterpretation.[19]

We can assume Ali did not intend for these cards to be shown in public or to non-Moors, except perhaps in case of emergency. However, once in the hands of newly converted Moorish-Americans these cards came to be used in public to dramatic effect. For some Moors these cards were talismans believed to protect the carrier from harm from any ill-intentioned white person. Since Ali felt knowledge of Moorish identity would protect his believers, we can assume that either Ali himself initiated this belief among his followers, or declined to challenge it when it arose among his converts. However, Ali did not encourage his followers to feel emboldened by the cards to the point of initiating altercations with whites and police, or making agitating speeches at work and on street corners. Yet perhaps as a result of the popular belief in the cards protective powers, some of the Moors had begun to behave in this way. Since the late 1930s academics have recounted these events as the police did, claiming that Moors had begun accosting innocent whites on the street in Chicago and other cities, flashing the identity cards and loudly exclaiming their new freedom as Moorish-Americans. Bontemps and Conroy described the Moors in Chicago, "They flaunted their fezzes on the street and treated the white man with undisguised contempt. Many of them affected formidable-

---

[19] Faucet, *Black Gods of the Metropolis*, 42-43; Bontemps and Conroy, *Anyplace But Here*, 206-207.

looking beards."[20] Apparently fist fights resulted frequently enough that the police began to give the movement increasing attention.[21]

A police officer in Detroit, interviewed by anthropologist Arthur Faucet in the early 1940s, recalled his contact with these Moors while the prophet had been alive: "What a terrible gang! Thieves and cutthroats! Wouldn't answer anything. Wouldn't sit down when you told them. Wouldn't stand up when you told them. Pretending they didn't understand you, that they were Moors from Morocco. They never saw Morocco! Those Moors never saw anything before they came to Detroit except Florida and Alabama!"[22] Comments such as this may have stemmed from and contributed to the local belief among whites and many blacks that Southern migrants were uppity, prone to confrontations with whites, and easily manipulated by alleged charlatans who, like Garvey, advocated black pride and civil disobedience.[23] However, Ali himself was no agitator. On the contrary, on the Moorish identity cards he had enjoined his followers to repeat the phrase, "I am a citizen of the USA," by placing it on the card in quotation marks. By this he affirmed his teachings of Moorish-Americans' duty to behave respectably by staying employed, supporting family and friends, dressing well, and treating others politely in public.[24] He also reminded followers with an American flag displayed prominently in his office and at the altar in every Moorish Science temple of their duty to earn the privileges of citizenship. However many rank-and-file Moorish-Americans had a more militant interpretation of that phrase believing it

---

[20] Bontemps and Conroy, *Anyplace But Here*, 206.
[21] Ibid., 206-207; Faucet, *Black Gods of the Metropolis*, 42-43.
[22] Faucet, *Black Gods of the Metropolis*, 43.
[23] Bontemps and Conroy, *Anyplace But Here*, 161, 167.
[24] Ali, *Koran*, 58-9.

asserted their right to challenge white authority as full, equal citizens of the US.[25]

The explanation for many Moors' interpretation of their rights as Americans and the aggressive way they used their identity cards rests also in the fact that many of Ali's followers, as well as being Southerners, may have been former or current Garveyites. Garvey's movement had drawn from that militant strain of the urban black community which strove to overturn white power and gain their portion of the American dream. Because the UNIA had begun to unravel in the late 1920s after Garvey's deportation, the nationalist tone of Ali's teachings no doubt appealed to and won over many still-energetic Garveyites, as did Ali's veneration of Garvey as a "John the Baptist"-style precursor to himself. Most importantly, many of these incidents were probably provoked by whites, other blacks, or police shocked by the Moors' dress or unusual names. Without question police and others opposed to the Moors have no doubt embellished their accounts of these incidents, portraying the Moors as initiators of every altercation in order to hide police harassment or frustration with confident Moorish-Americans who preached at the workplace and in the streets, and engaged in civil disobedience.[26]

Ali became frustrated with his followers and issued a warning to his believers to avoid conflict in the streets. He wrote a proclamation which was to be read at every temple stating,

> I hereby inform all members that they must end all radical agitating speeches while at work in their homes or on the streets. We are for peace not destruction. Stop flashing your cards at Europeans; it

---

[25] Theodore G. Vincent, *Black Power and the Garvey Movement* (Berkeley, California: Ramparts Press, 1971), 221-2.

[26] Lawrence W. Levine, "Marcus Garvey and the Politics of Revitalization" in *Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century*, ed. John Hope Franklin and August Meier (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 121-3; Ali, *Koran*, 59.

> causes confusion. Remember your card is for your salvation. Failure to obey these orders will be of severe consequence. We are for Love, Truth, Peace, Freedom and Justice, and when these principles are violated, justice must then take its course.[27]

There is no record of what effect if any Ali's stern warning had on his militant followers. Did they resent this scolding considering Ali had gotten his start by holding such impromptu speeches himself? Already at this early stage Ali was beginning to lose control of his movement, frequently issuing menacing statements such as these to try to reign in militant followers. Ali's movement was suffering from what Cheryl Lynn Greenberg has described as the "schizophrenia" which afflicts many black organizations. In discussing the NAACP and the New York Urban League she has argued that by the mid 1930s their inability to completely satisfy militant rank-and-file membership and conservative white patrons simultaneously undermined their legitimacy with both sides. I would agree adding that this trend has probably always existed as long as blacks have lived in the US. This problem affected the Moorish Science Temple which had no white benefactors, but which nonetheless tried to initiate some dramatic changes in African Americans' status without inflaming the police or the conservative black upper-class, whose support on which they would soon depend. Clearly, Noble Drew Ali interpreted American citizenship as a privilege to be lived up to once blacks discovered the prestige of their ethnicity and culture as Moorish-Americans. If Ali had only wished to remain a storefront preacher he could have allowed such incidents. But his ambitions of rising into Chicago's black political machine precluded this type of militant patriotism. Thus he needed to restrain these militant members who

---

[27] Noble Drew Ali, "Moorish Literature" reprinted. in *The Holy Koran, Circle Seven*, ed. Malachi Z. York Malachizodok (Brooklyn, New York: n.p., n.d.), XXXVIII.

were crucial workers in expanding the movement, though disagreements with them eventually tore it apart.[28]

More evidence of the growth of Ali's movement soon appeared in the pages of the *Chicago Defender* in the form of an advertisement. Ali could now afford to utilize this form of mass communication to promote his meetings, which were in themselves also advertisements. *Defender* staff entitled Ali's ad, formatted as a news article, "Sheiks, Prophets Figure in Great Moorish Drama," which invited Chicagoans to come to the Moorish Science Temple the following Monday night. The "Drama" included a performance by singer Mme. Lomax-Bey (a founding member of the organization and wife of one of Ali's directors), a lecture on Moorish Science, described as "this nationalistic topic," a Houdini-style escape from binding with ropes by Noble Drew Ali, healings by the prophet, and "refreshments."[29] This all took place at 3140 Indiana Ave., known as the Unity Club which, much like many halls in Chicago, was used by blacks for meetings and parties of all kinds. The hall was leased by prominent real estate agent Claude Greene who had struck up a friendship with Noble Drew Ali and offered to make the Unity Club available for Moorish events.[30]

While the "Moorish Drama" might seem like a promotional event that would actually discredit Ali's new religion, blacks may not have perceived it as such since the event was very similar to respectable fraternal gatherings which often featured singers, dances, lectures, food and drink. Further, some Spiritualist churches held performance-style services that included displays of magical or mystical powers by a medium or "adept" as a way of demonstrating authenticity to prospective believers. As such Ali could

---

[28] Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *"Or Does It Explode?": Black Harlem in the Great Depression* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 119.

[29] "Sheiks, Prophets Figure in Great Moorish Drama," *CD*, 14 May 1927.

[30] See for example, "Knights of Africa to Meet in Chicago," *CD*, 24 July 1926; "Blame Split in Cult for Brutal Crime," *CD*, 16 March 1929.

advertise the Moorish Drama as a legitimate occasion for the communication of his religious and nationalist messages without discrediting himself with much of black Chicago. Even the *Defender*, while not actively promoting the Moorish Science Temple, gladly printed Ali's advertisement. Since the paper stayed afloat financially in part by printing hundreds of popular occultism ads, which editorial staff nonetheless perceived as catering to gullible Southerners, the *Defender* printed the "Moorish Drama" piece, but not without subtly mocking it with the applied headline.[31] Perhaps after having read the text of the advertisement, the *Defender* staff member charged with writing the ad's headline was convinced the Moors were pitching some kind of vaudeville act or Spiritualist service. Certainly the term "Sheik," had a double meaning; many Moorish men used this Masonic title, but it was also a pejorative colloquial term describing a young male hustler, a masculine counterpart to the female "flapper."[32]

Regardless of whether the audience perceived the "Moorish Drama" as religious, political, simply entertaining, or all of these combined, it is clear events such as this were drawing converts into the ranks of the Moorish Science Temple. New converts in the early days of the movement's growth would gain an opportunity to get in on the ground level of a black Spiritualist-

---

[31] The poster associated with this event may in fact be the source of the popular tradition which depicts Noble Drew Ali as a magician due to the escape-act portion of the proceedings. Victoria W. Walcott, "Mediums, Messages, and Lucky Numbers: African-American Female Spiritualists and Numbers Runners in Interwar Detroit." in *The Geography of Identity*, ed. Patricia Jaeger (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 296, 302; Roi Ottley, *New World A-Coming* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943), 280; Claude McKay, *Harlem: Negro Metropolis.* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1940), 75-82.

[32] The *Defender* published many articles describing incidents involving young black men with impure intentions, termed "Sheiks," harrassing young black women in the streets and inviting them into their. cars. See for example "Warn Women Against Sheik Auto Drivers," *CD*, 6 March 1926.

style movement whose prophet held aspirations of becoming an integral part of Chicago politics. A politically well-connected prophet could make his plans for the uplifting of Moorish-Americans through economic and political self-sufficiency a reality. In the meantime, rank-and-file members would have a key role to play proselytizing and running temples, something not available to them through the large established denominations which required college educated leaders.

The next coup in the prophet's career was his endorsement by the *Chicago Defender* in the spring of 1928 through a series of polite articles praising the prophet's works and hyping his public appearances. Perhaps Ali's earlier strict response to police complaints about the allegedly aggressive behavior of some Moorish-Americans had reined in militant members. Ali may have done this by restricting their militant proselytizing to temple services. Thus, with his believers on the right side of the law, his leadership consolidated, his movement off the street and housed in Unity Hall, the Moorish Science Temple was eligible for the *Defender's* support having shed its earlier status as a jack-leg preacher's "cult." Support from the *Defender* was a great boon for Ali, who hoped to gather a national following by straddling the line between elite uplift organizations and popular Spiritualism which had so many believers among the bulk of black society. Ali needed the support of many such 'average' African Americans in order to bill himself as a representative of black votes. He also had to balance their desires with the opinions of elite society and the powerful men of the black political machine, certainly no easy task.

The *Defender's* approval shows its editors perceived the Moors as a legitimate religious organization, and took Ali's claims to prophethood at face value. As we have seen, the *Defender* reserved a place for some of black

Chicago's alternative religious groups, most notably those the staff perceived to be respectable, high-brow and mystical in tone, and to be working towards African-American equality in the United States. Thus, the Moorish Science Temple joined the Theosophists, Bahá'ís, and Swedenborgians in the *Defender's* pages, though, unlike these others, never in the "Where to Worship" section. Further, unlike many Spiritualist churches which closely resembled the Moorish Science Temple in doctrine and style, Ali's movement affirmed the *Defender's* definition of legitimacy since it was headed by a man, though some temple governors were women. In addition, Abbott may have believed that the Moorish Science Temple was absorbing Garveyites and thus draining the membership of the UNIA. Thus it would have been natural to endorse a popular rival to Garvey's movement upon which Abbott had waged a media war for a number of years.[33]

Noble Drew Ali must have been thrilled to find his movement among those the *Defender* favored. He certainly had the media savvy to use the *Defender's* attention to its full potential by staging pseudo-events and photo opportunities he knew would show up in the paper, promote his movement and increase his personal status. His first opportunity came on June 30, 1928 when the *Defender* reported "Moorish Leader is Postmaster's Guest." Ali's visit to the post office involved a brief audience with the well-known postmaster, Arthur Lueder, and a tour of the facilities by "President Ali" (no mention was made of Ali's prophethood), Ali's wife Pearl Ali, and two other prominent Moors. The article went on to praise the Moorish Science Temple as one which would soon be incorporated federally as a religious corporation such that "it will possibly be the only nonwhite organization in the United States fostering the Moslem religion." This *Defender* reporter understood that Noble Drew Ali's self-

---

[33] Bontemps and Conroy, *Anyplace But Here*, 202-3.

appointed commission was to spread an Islam that was by and for African-Americans. Further, this article may have been a subtle message to those Muslims, probably the local Ahmadiyya missionaries, that they were not welcome in black Chicago unless they allowed blacks an equal role in their movement. The *Defender* continued proudly, "President Ali teaches fundamental principles which are desired for civilization, such as obedience to law, respect and loyalty to government, tolerance and unity." Indeed, this description must have come directly from Ali who, perhaps in light of earlier problems with police, wished to portray the Moors as a thoroughly respectable uplift organization.[34]

Noble Drew Ali's visit to the postmaster was a natural step for someone in the process of working his way into the networks of Chicago's African-American political machine. In 1928, one quarter of the city's postal employees were black. Most blacks perceived a job at the post office, which required a high school diploma and success on the civil-service exam, as a prestigious position where they would suffer from little discrimination and would be paid well. Those with ambition often worked at the post office while earning a real estate license, or a law or medical degree. Those in African-American political circles had come to expect that blacks would continue to hold a large proportion of post office jobs, and that postal jobs would be handed out as favors to the friends and acquaintances of politically well-connected blacks. As Republicans in a city ruled by Democrats all through the 1920s, blacks made maintenance of the status quo important to Chicago's Republican postmaster, Arthur Lueder. Having run for mayor in 1923 and lost, Lueder knew that the postmaster's job might in future provide him with an entry point into Chicago city politics only if he acquiesced to African-American

---

[34] "Moorish Leader is Postmaster's Guest," *CD*, 30 June 1928.

expectations. Noble Drew Ali no doubt wanted to make a place for himself in this network of political power and favors, perhaps hoping to become a broker of postal jobs himself. In this way he could aid Moorish-Americans in getting post office work, proselytize among postal workers, present himself as a representative of black votes, and associate his movement with a prestigious profession, many members of which were Chicago's future black elite. Indeed such a pseudo-event, rather than rabble rousing speeches, was Ali's preferred method of workplace proselytization.[35]

This first article also reported that the Moors had begun to establish a number of businesses as part of their program of respectable self-help. Many African Americans believed that a strong and independent black economy, financed and patronized exclusively by blacks would give whites one less way to manipulate the race by providing jobs and circulating African-American workers' income within their own community. Some black businesses were fabulous successes, usually those which catered to black markets whites would not or could not serve, such as those for funeral services, cosmetic and hair dressing products, insurance, and 'race' newspapers. The Moorish Science Temple in Chicago had plans for a grocery store a few doors away from Unity Hall where it raised money through Saturday night dances, and by collections at the Friday and Sunday evening religious services. The Detroit, Pittsburgh and Milwaukee temples similarly owned groceries or laundries. There is no direct evidence that any of the Moors' businesses were fronts for numbers or gambling operations. However, in light of Ali's later courtship of one particular gambling syndicate boss, related black politicians, and the police, it seems possible, even likely. In spite of Ali's conservative teachings and

---

[35] Ibid.; Harold F. Gosnell, *Negro Politicians: The Rise of Negro Politics in Chicago* (1935; repr. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1967),302-9.

statements forbidding profiteering within his movement, the prophet and many of his followers probably saw the informal economy as a legitimate one. Just as Ali demanded Moorish-Americans be true to themselves by refusing to follow any white man's religion, he argued that on a more practical level a Moor's independence was built upon doing business "under his own vine and fig tree."[36] Ali's own businesses and any participation by Moors in the informal economy would have been part of a plan to recycle members' incomes among Moors and within the larger black community.[37]

The Moors were involved in one other business which was more controversial but no doubt quite lucrative. Noble Drew Ali established the Moorish Manufacturing Corporation in a building two blocks from Unity Hall sometime before July 1927. There the Moors manufactured a number of products, among them Moorish Mineral and Healing Oil, Moorish Antiseptic Bath Compound, and Moorish Body Builder and Blood Purifier. Ali made some extraordinary claims for his products advertising, for example, that the Moorish Body Builder could be taken by men, women and children for "Rheumatism, Lung Trouble, Rundown Constitutions, Indigestion, and loss of Manhood." These products appear to have been no different than the many tonics and patent medicines advertised in the newspaper or available from any druggist. Since the prophet forbade Moorish-Americans from drinking, Moorish tonics did not contain alcohol unlike other contemporary medicinal cure-alls. Only one product, Moorish Herb Tea for Human Ailments, mentioned by Bontemps and Conroy but not advertised in the *Moorish Guide*, resembled

---

[36] Ali, *Koran*, 59;

[37] Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 84-85, 220-224, 442-468; Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 148-150; "Moorish Leader is Postmaster's Guest," *CD*, 30 June 1928; Victoria W. Walcott, "The Culture of the Informal Economy: Numbers Runners in Inter-War Black Detroit." *Radical History Review* 69 (1997): 46-75.

the magic potions, incense and "get him back" etc. candles sold by occult vendors. Associations made later by Faucet, Bontemps and Conroy, and *Defender* articles between Moorish Mfg. products and "charms and nostrums" some Moors sold personally in defiance of the prophet's orders, have given this Moorish business a bad reputation among academics. Like the *Defender*, early writers, such as Bontemps and Conroy, perceived such popular healers and magic as the tools of charlatans who exploited superstitious Southerners. No doubt Ali established Moorish Manufacturing Inc. with honorable intentions, modeling it on other prominent race businesses such as the Ovington Hygienic Company and Binga State Bank. In fact Ali may have intended for his products and Moorish businesses to dissolve any connection between the Moors and the informal economy in the eyes of elite respectable black society, though Ali or some other Moors nonetheless were participants in the informal economy.[38]

The Moors established another business by publishing their own newspaper, the *Moorish Guide*, in August of 1928. Prominent African-Americans often competed to influence black public opinion and to promote respectable behavior by publishing newspapers or magazines. Thus Ali's career as newspaper owner and chief editor was almost inevitable. Resembling many of the "race" papers published by African Americans of that era, the irregularly-issued *Moorish Guide* was Ali's mouthpiece and main form of communication with far-flung followers in a dozen states. The paper

---

[38] Testimonial letters placed next to large advertisements for Moorish healing products were, when dated, printed displaying a date of July 28, 29, or 30, 1927 in the Moors newspaper, *Moorish Guide*, when it began publication in September 1928. While these letters may have been fakes planted simply to promote Moorish Products, it is likely they were real letters from customers saved and used later in the paper. Thus, the date can be used to surmise when the Moors had raised enough money to launch this business. *MG*, 26 October 1928; Bontemps and Conroy, *Anyplace But Here*, 206; Faucet, *Black Gods of the Metropolis*, 43.

reported on the prophet's activities, carried news of prominent Moors, listed all the movement's temples, contained advertisements for Moorish Manufacturing Inc. products, as well as testimonials by satisfied customers. Sections of Ali's *Holy Koran* were reprinted weekly along with the biographies of famous African Americans who were always described as being "Moorish." The newspaper also carried advertising by local Chicago entrepreneurs such as lawyers, repairmen, hairdressers and real estate agents, many of whom were clearly Moorish-American having names ending in "Bey" or "El." True to the prophet's and most Moors' belief in the potential of black business, the *Moorish Guide* was a sensational showcase for black establishments, some owned by non-Moors who saw the paper as a viable method of communication in black Chicago.[39]

Most intriguing of all, the paper listed the financial statements of each temple for the period 1927-28. By late October 1928 there were fifteen Moorish Science Temple branches, two of which were in Chicago, the rest in the Mid-West or the South, surprisingly with none in the important black community of Harlem. Total membership of all temples was probably around 3500, taking into account that some temples declined to report this information. The Pittsburgh temple boasted 489 members, 147 of whom were "Adepts," and listed "Grand Total Paid to The Prophet ..... $4,221.42" among their expenses. The Detroit temple listed "Donation to The Prophet" as only $700.00, though they had also sent "Money Orders to the Home Office" totaling $1947.65. Clearly, Noble Drew Ali was benefiting personally from the success of his movement. Ali's personal financial gain was acceptable to Ali's followers since, like many black Spiritualist and New Thought movements, wealth was a measure of one's

---

[39] Levine, "Marcus Garvey," 107-8; Drake and Cayton, *Black Gods of the Metropolis*, 640-1, 645; "Browning the Poet was of Moorish Descent," *MG*, 26 October 1928.

understanding of the divine within, respectability, and legitimacy. Ali no doubt believed God was rewarding him with abundance in life, by sending so many hardworking converts who were filling the movement's coffers and making a success out of Moorish businesses.

Other expenses in Detroit included operating costs for Moorish businesses, utilities such as telephone and gas, a Temple-owned automobile, insurance, and printing press equipment. The organizational structure suggested by these reports, namely a head temple housing the prophet supported by a series of subordinate temples, mirrored the form of many African-American popular churches and new religions. The Black Jews, Father Divine's House of Grace, some Spiritual churches and other religious movements initiated by a single charismatic leader were all organized in this way so that the prophet or leader could control and administer his flock, and promote a sense of community among them. Members gained an opportunity to take on leadership or auxiliary positions in Moorish temples, the Moorish Guide, or other Moorish businesses, clearly attracting African Americans who wished to personally lend a hand in "uplifting" the race and defining black respectability.[40]

With a growing membership, Ali's *Moorish Guide* quickly became financially viable; however, newspaper publishing could be a dangerous business for politically-inclined blacks like Noble Drew Ali. The United States government had a record of attempting to suppress black publications it deemed subversive. Indeed, as recently as 1920, lobbyists working for the black paper *New York Age* and the NAACP had struggled to guarantee the narrow defeat in Congress of the Graham sedition bill designed to abolish delivery through the postal system of African-American publications deemed

---

[40] "Report of Temples," *MG*, 26 October 1928.

radical. Thus Ali needed to maintain firm editorial control over the *Moorish Guide*. Any content which directly criticized the government or whites, could make the paper a target for state harassment. Many other black publishers had suffered suppression of their publications. Garvey's *Negro World* had been banned by various colonial governments in Africa and the Caribbean, as well as the South where the *Defender* was also forced underground by authorities in certain areas. Train workers, perhaps Ali himself, had been used as couriers in a clandestine delivery network of both papers in the American South. Further, Noble Drew Ali began publication of his newspaper just as the American government's harassment of Marcus Garvey, only part of which included suppression of his paper, had resulted in the UNIA leader's arrest and deportation. Even Garvey's enemies in the black community took these events as a warning that blacks could only challenge the structure of American society to a very limited degree. Perhaps knowing this, the prophet had tried to gain some assurance, during his brief meeting with Chicago's postmaster, that the *Moorish Guide* would not be confiscated, misdirected or brought to the attention of the police by Lueder, as other postmasters had done with the *Defender* and *Negro World*.[41]

Two weeks after his visit to the postmaster and a subsequent visit to the Pine Bluff, Arkansas temple, Noble Drew Ali announced that the Moors would hold a "National Conclave" in October. The Prophet commented to a *Defender* reporter that the gathering was an opportunity for the movement to show off Moorish businesses which the *Defender* touted as, "blazing the trail and marking the pathway over which our posterity may travel unhampered and

---

41 Tony Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Westport, Conneticut: Greenwood Press, 1976), 99, 183, 190; Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 44, 78, 86.

unafraid."[42] However, Noble Drew Ali was more modest stating, "It must be kept in mind that no great movement can take definite shape in two or three years so as to be error proof. However, through accumulating experience each annual convention ought to witness a more perfect and wider functioning organization. . . [with] members throughout the country and possibly in time the world over." The prophet, who was struggling to maintain absolute control over the many branches of his movement, added somewhat disingenuously, "Constructive criticism from sympathetic friends in and outside of our ranks is welcome."[43] Obviously the *Defender* had become one of Ali's friends, and with the newspaper's help the Moors were about to develop a prominent public profile. Ali's Moorish Conclave, with its plans for a costume ball, parade and open house at Moorish businesses would function as a coming out party for the Moors, promoted by the *Defender* in Chicago and all over the United States. And, like the visit to the postmaster, a conclave would provide Ali with another controlled venue for proselytization where again he was the focus and could act as gatekeeper of the message the Moors sent out to the community.[44]

The *Defender* optimistically predicted that, "Indications are that this convention will be one of the most interesting ever held in the city. . . There will be an interesting parade, in which men and women members will wear regalia similar to that worn in eastern countries. A camel will be used."[45]

---

[42] "Moorish Head Makes Plans for Conclave," *CD*, 14 July 1928.

[43] Most writers have taken the Prophet's claim to have established a temple in Newark in 1913 to be true. Ali's statements regarding having had only two or three years to get his movement established may have referred only to the Chicago Temples. However, it seems more likely Ali was admitting that the movement had started in Chicago, lending credence to the possibility that Ali had no other temples when he arrived in Chicago, but had spent time as a member of some other religious group during the early 1920s. "Moorish Head Makes Plans for Conclave," *CD*, 14 July 1928.

[44] Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 92.

[45] "Moorish Head Makes Plans for Conclave," *CD*, 14 July 1928.

Such positive promotion of the Moors' proposed pseudo-Moroccan parade is not surprising because the *Defender* did not perceive such displays to be embarrassing if put on by blacks who had been accepted into black political circles and expressed this acceptance in the context of Masonic and Shriner parades. By displaying the Moors this way, Ali was cueing audiences to perceive the Moorish Science Temple as a fraternal order in terms of its respectability, community uplift programs, and wealth. The *Defender's* support of Ali's participation in the privileged parade tradition, complete with Eastern regalia and camel shows their overwhelming approval of Ali's businesses and conservative politics, which apparently were not tarnished by the movement's earlier problems with police. Perhaps Ali downplayed the Moors' religiosity, portraying the movement as a quasi-fraternal civic organization during the conclave to distance himself from the "cults" and storefront Spiritualists associated with poor Southern migrants. Such an association would have detracted from his legitimacy with powerful black elites. The *Defender's* support was contingent on Ali's presentation of the Moorish Science Temple as respectable in elite-black terms. Thus Ali simply did not have the option of presenting his movement as a solely spiritual organization because, unlike the Bahá'ís, he did not have a largely elite membership.[46]

All of black Chicago must have understood that the Moorish religious convention would be a brazenly political affair. Along with the three thousand Moorish delegates that the *Moorish Guide* boasted had come from around the country, the prophet had orchestrated personal appearances by some of Chicago's most prominent men. Alderman Louis B. Anderson, presently campaigning to serve his seventh consecutive term in Chicago's

---

[46] Ibid.

primarily black Second Ward, gave the opening address. Congressional candidate Oscar DePriest, a prominent black businessman in Chicago, who was a long-time participant in city politics and currently a Congressional candidate, delivered the closing address that same night.[47] The *Moorish Guide* reported these men's attendance gratefully, "Notwithstanding the fact Hon. Oscar DePriest as well as Alderman Anderson was very busy with the campaign, they took time to stay throughout the meeting."[48] These men's attendance was no act of charity though, since of course Noble Drew Ali had shrewdly guaranteed their presence by staging his affair during campaign season when either candidate would scramble to speak to any large crowd of African Americans. The fact that the *Defender* was giving the convention city-wide and national coverage only made the opportunity more compelling for all involved.

Also invited but unable to attend the Moors' convention was the very well-known and well-liked Daniel M. Jackson. Jackson was one of the wealthiest and most powerful blacks in Chicago. He was described by one author as,

> the head of the strongest syndicate ever organized in the "Black Belt," the czar of the colored underworld. Canny and close-mouthed, he could be trusted by the police and by the politicians. His agents made regular collections from the privileged establishments on a percentage basis. Those places which did not belong to the syndicate were raided by the police and put out of business or whipped into line.[49]

No one could ignore Jackson, particularly a prophet trying to run black-owned businesses on the South Side in the name of his new religion. Jackson's syndicate also "controlled vice, bootlegging, cabarets, and such gambling

---

[47] "Delegates Assemble from Fifteen States: Prominent Men Deliver Addresses," *MG*, 26 October1928; Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 367-8; Gosnell, *Negro Politicians*, 75.

[48] "Delegates Assemble" *MG*, 26 October 1928.

[49] Gosnell, *Negro Politicians*, 132.

games as craps, poker, and policy."[50] In short, Jackson was a successful entrepreneur of the informal economy, someone who had adapted to the most lucrative and accessible business opportunities blacks had at the time. Though ostensibly illegal, Jackson's businesses catered to both black and white Chicagoans, and funneled money back into the black community. While Louis Anderson and Oscar DePriest had both had their brushes with the political networks of Chicago's police and government, they paled in comparison to Jackson who had become as powerful as he was wealthy. Ali did not mind Jackson's association with crime and vice since he was perceived by many African Americans as a man who had simply made Chicago's patronage networks and political system work in his favor. Shrewdly, Jackson had achieved such a public profile by spreading his power and money around the black community, becoming known and appreciated for his many acts of charity, both in the form of financial donations to clubs, schools and community organizations, and through the granting of police protection, rigged city business licenses, bail guarantees and other favors to those endeared to him somehow.[51]

Unfortunately perhaps for the Moors, Daniel Jackson did not attend Ali's conclave, claiming he was too busy with his duties as a member of the Illinois Commerce Commission in the state capital. Recognizing his respect among black voters in Chicago, Governor Len Small had appointed Jackson to the post two weeks before the convention. Most African Americans probably saw this appointment as a recognition of the legitimacy of such informal economy magnates and politicians. One prominent Moor, Claude Greene, may have been the force behind Ali's courting of Daniel Jackson. Greene, originally from

---

[50] Ibid., 131.
[51] Ibid., 131-3.

Shreveport, Louisiana, was a graduate of Tuskegee Institute, founded by Booker T. Washington. In Chicago Greene had careers as a butler to philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, a real estate agent, and a civil servant. He was also the secretary of the Chicago Boosters Civic Club, a notary public, and most importantly, Noble Drew Ali's business manager. Greene may have been attracted to Ali's movement due to his own ambitions in Chicago politics, seeing the Moorish Science Temple as a forum for his views. That Greene sincerely believed Ali's religious teachings is hard to prove though we can be sure he found them familiar and reasonable. Greene, as former butler to Julius Rosenwald, perhaps had contact with African-American or other "Eastern" mystics in Rosenwald's home. Recall that the *Defender* story relating the psychic demonstration by an "Egyptian telepathist" before academics from the University of Chicago, took place in Rosenwald's household, though probably after Greene had quit working there.[52]

Calling himself Sheik Claude Greene, his experience and connections in local politics were invaluable to Ali, only recently arrived in Chicago and desirous of becoming a broker of black votes himself. Greene had a long-standing relationship with Jackson, from whom he had leased Unity Hall. Writing in the *Moorish Guide* shortly after Jackson's appointment to the Commerce Commission, Greene praised Jackson claiming his success as a businessman was matched only by his many generous acts of altruism. "It stands to his record that he has given without show or display to the appeals made for the cause of missions, education, employment, religious institutions and the poor. This is the man, unselfish and unassuming, of broad sympathies,

---

[52] "Says He Believed Telepathy is real," *CD*, 1 January, 1927; "Greene Heads Chicago Boosters Civic Club," *CD*, 12 January 1929; "Blame Split in Cult for Brutal Crime," *CD*, 16 March 1929.

liberal charities and of business acumen, the Honorable Daniel M. Jackson."[53] Was Jackson already giving money or protection to Noble Drew Ali's "religious institution," or was Greene's article a request for funds or influence? Either way, we can be sure Greene had arranged for the Moorish Science Temple, or at least its businesses, to enter into Jackson's realm of influence in order to prosper in the Second Ward of Chicago. Greene's fellow Moorish-Americans probably supported this move recognizing that such a patron could provide the worldly political connections and funding the Moors needed to spread their spiritual and nationalist ideas.[54]

Noble Drew Ali told a *Defender* reporter he had also invited Binga State Bank owner, Jesse Binga, who later failed to appear at any convention event. Other local elites involved in the movement included African-American attorney Aaron Payne, associate of Daniel Jackson, and George W. Blackwell, black State Representative; neither of these men or Claude Greene used the Moorish names Bey or El after their names but publicly described themselves as Moors nonetheless, sometimes using the title "Sheik." Clearly Ali was trying to woo politically important and respectable African Americans, businessmen, politicians, power brokers, because of Ali's own ambitions to gain power for the Moors by offering the black political machine their votes as a block in exchange for political favors. The prophet's teachings of Moorish-Americans' duty to take their place among the country's many ethnic groups included participation in the nation's political system, even Chicago's corrupt but legitimate political machine, in order for Moorish-Americans to achieve the equality and security they deserved. Presumably, all these men took Ali and his fez and turban-clad Moors seriously enough to see them as a potential

---

[53] Claude D. Greene, "Jackson Succeeds Edward H. Wright," *MG*, 14 September 1928.

[54] Wolcott, "Culture of the Informal Economy," 52.

block of African-American votes to be courted. How they perceived the specifics of his nationalist and religious teachings is impossible to say, but it appears they were not scared off by Ali's claim to prophethood.[55]

Ali's public association with some of black Chicago's political heavy hitters was crucial to giving an air of importance to the Moorish Science Temple's first national gathering. The hype surrounding the event culminated in the movement's public demonstration of Moorish culture most prominently displayed during a parade on the second day of the convention. At two o'clock on a Wednesday afternoon several thousand Moorish-American men, women and children, many carrying a Moroccan flag (also the flag of the Moorish Science Temple) in one hand and an American flag in the other, arrived at 37th and State Street, site of recently-purchased property for a future temple. Some of the group posed before a *Chicago Defender* staff photographer. Noble Drew Ali had probably conceived of the parade as a photo opportunity from the beginning. The resulting photograph appeared in the *Defender* and on the front page of the subsequent edition of the *Moorish Guide*. In the centre stands Noble Drew Ali posing in his favored Masonic-oath-style pose, right hand resting against his chest. To his right and left, and standing on the wide stairwell behind him are some of the Moorish Science Temple's most prominent members, including those early directors with whom Ali had roomed, and the leaders of temples from across the country. This photo appeared in the local press as did similar photos following fraternal conclaves, so readers would have had no difficulty interpreting its reference to the respectable black organizing tradition.[56]

---

[55] "Delegates Assemble" *MG*, 26 October 1928. "Moors to Hold National Conclave October 14," *CD*, 13 October 1928.

[56] "Moorish Parade," *MG*, 26 October 1928; "Hold Session of Moorish Science Body," *CD*, 20 October 1928.

The group was dressed in a collection of turbans, fezzes, Arab and 'King Tut'-style headdresses. The men wore baggy pants made of brightly colored, often striped fabric with loud jackets and filigreed sashes. The women dressed in similarly styled gowns and headgear. The *Defender's* dead-pan report stated, "Sister Pearl Ali, the distinguished wife of the prophet, wore the costume of a native Moroccan princess. . . Noble Drew Ali wore a native Moroccan prince's costume."[57] The scene then grew even more stunning for Ali had arranged to juxtapose his black-Orientalist representation of Moroccan royalty with uniformed police to create a truly unusual spectacle. The *Moorish Guide* reported, "The Prophet, in securing a permit for the parade also secured a squad of European police to accompany his car in the parade."[58] The Moorish parade proclaimed to black Chicago the movement's affiliation with the city's political machine, being a show of power and influence, as well as pride. Ali was also attempting to guarantee the future success of his movement and its businesses, and he did not want to fall victim to police and state harassment by being perceived as a threat as Garvey and the Abyssinians had. He also had to publicly endorse the contemporary political system to ensure his inclusion in it and associate his Moorish-American ethnicity with American patriotism.

Local African Americans would have understood the message of Ali's parade and press coverage perfectly clearly. The *Moorish Guide* described the purpose of the event as to raise public awareness, further claiming the parade had sparked enough interest in the Moorish Science Temple to inspire a number new converts. Indeed, for some of Chicago's blacks Ali's public demonstration of his connections to the power elite, both black and white was

---

57 "Hold Session of Moorish Science Body," *CD*, 20 October 1928.
58 "Moorish Parade," *MG*, 26 October 1928.

probably an encouragement to join the Moors. Somehow Ali and his followers had managed to translate their Moroccan-style garb and names into symbols of authenticity by drawing on the popular conceptions of black history and fraternal parade representations of it, combined with Ali's apparent pull in Chicago political circles. The white police may have felt Noble Drew Ali and his group were strange, but looked the other way since he appeared to control votes and could pay them off when necessary. Similarly, the *Defender*, exceedingly pleased with the success of Moorish businesses, was also prepared not to scrutinize Moorish Science too closely, politely advertising a parade that appeared to contain a very familiar retelling of current political and cultural beliefs. Ali no doubt felt proud to be putting his teachings of unity, loyalty to the state, and the truth of Moorish nationalism into practice through a pragmatic adaptation to the political situation in Chicago. Perhaps he believed God was granting him so much attention, new converts and temples, and the support of the Chicago political and business community because he had indeed discovered how to unlock the divine essence within himself.[59]

God was blessing Ali in other ways also. Money was rolling in at a steady rate. The prophet was no millionaire, but he was living well and had the money to travel to distant temples, to support Pearl Ali's active career as a community organizer, and to establish successful and protected businesses. Yet, during the convention meetings the prophet had put into place a new body known as the Supreme Grand Council with himself as Supreme Grand Chairman. This council was to have complete administrative and financial control over all Moorish Science Temple properties and income. The need to centralize control was due to the activities of certain Sheiks and Governors from outlying temples who were putting Ali's principle of self-help into

---

[59] Ibid.

practice in their own way. Some of them had begun to make tidy profits by skimming off membership dues and selling Moorish products and publications at inflated prices.[60] Apparently some of the men Ali appointed to administer temples took his orders, "to function by words, deeds and action, imitating the Prophet," too literally.[61] These believers may also have felt they were simply living up to their own divine potential by obtaining influence and money on the side, just as Ali did by participating in city politics and collecting dues. Some of these believers may have been those involved in rabble-rousing workplace speeches earlier, and may have resented Ali's silencing of them and his insistence that they direct their proselytization work through tame public events the prophet controlled, such as the Moorish conclave and post office visit. Some of them may just have been opportunists. Nonetheless, Ali had the cost of dues, identity cards and buttons published in the *Moorish Guide* to prevent price inflation and further profit making at specific temples.[62]

The demands for money found in the Moorish Guide throughout 1928 and the first few months of 1929 are striking in their frequency. During 1928 Ali sternly threatened non-compliant Governors and Grand Sheiks that they must submit monthly financial reports on time, "otherwise, it will necessitate a representative calling on such delinquent Temples and audit their books, which expense will have to be borne by the Temple."[63] Each temple ran like a business and was expected to show a profit and submit it to Temple #1 in Chicago. Further, the prophet rewarded temples who were bringing in the most revenue. In February 1929 Ali sent a letter, the only one that seems to have survived, in which he made clear his philosophy regarding the

---

60 "Hold Session of Moorish Science Body," *CD*, 20 October 1928.
61 "The Prophet Has Spoken," *MG*, 26 October 1928.
62 "General Laws As Said By The Prophet," *MG*, 26 October 1928.
63 "Think This Over You Moors," *MG*, 26 October 1928.

relationship between his divine work and the mundane world of temple budgets. He wrote,

> Dear Brother:
> If you desire to see me earlier -- you will have to notify your members under a heavy restriction and warning that the more Uplifting Funds they send in to me, the sooner they can see me and the more I know they desire to see me, because I have to raise the finance of a few thousand dollars to place the Nation far beyond their present conditions. It takes finance to Uplift a down trodden people, and place it among the other prosperous Nations of the world. And as a sacrifice to the Moslem Creed, I have sacrificed my life, finance, and labor to place the Nation on an intelligent and financial footing. This matter is to be attended to at once. I will be among those first that appreciate me as Prophet, and the great work that I am doing.[64]

Apparently, money could buy love for the Governors and Sheiks of the various Moorish Science Temples.

This kind of reward system was only part of a constant stream of demands for money issued by the prophet, which included "Temple taxes," dues, revenue from the sale of Ali's book of religious teachings, the *Koran*, and the identity cards. Ali also expected that every Moor buy yearly subscriptions to the *Moorish Guide*. Ali's attitude was probably shared by many of his followers, aspiring temple leaders and organizers, and die-hard realists who knew that the spread of Moorish Science required money to rent and purchase temple buildings, publish religious tracts, and perform acts of charity. This philosophy was also justified by Ali's teachings which focused on the divine potential within each person to create peace and abundance in life. In addition, the prophet knew he could get away with his demands because each African American in Chicago would decide for him or herself which religious leaders were legitimate and which were profiteers. For every respectable

---

[64] Noble Drew Ali, Chicago, to unnamed Moor, 5 February, 1929, Box SCM 90-78, Folder 2, MST.

Christian residing on the South Side who perceived leaders of new religions, like Ali, to be swindlers, there was another person who made similar complaints about the graft inherent in the big, established black denominations, which financed elaborate churches but seemed to have no time for a personal relationship with the congregation. As such, we need not necessarily judge Ali harshly for his preoccupation with money, since for him wealth was evidence of the validity of his interpretation of Islam, and required for the uplifting of Moorish-Americans. Thus his demands for financial statements, and the use of his visits as rewards for compliance appear more as the desperate acts of someone who was not in full control of all the sheep in his flock, than someone consumed by greed.[65]

It is likely some Moors did resent the prophet's demands for money and knew much of the Temples' resources were being siphoned off by Governors and Sheiks. Outside observers also began to characterize Ali as a charlatan, and perhaps had heard rumors some Moors were selling "charms and nostrums" to believers.[66] Some Moors may have engaged in such commercial transactions since, as pragmatists, they may have realized they could bring money and new believers into the Moorish Science Temple by offering such magical products. They may also have simply been opportunists who realized the movement was attracting blacks interested in black Spiritualism who were not prepared to retain their mystical beliefs and forgo their magical ones. The prophet may have disliked his movement's association with this aspect of the informal economy since he was attempting to rise above the status of storefront or jack-leg preacher, and retain the support of the *Defender.* He

---

[65] "Help Build Your Paper," *MG*, 14 September 1928; "Prophet Makes Plea to Nation," *MG*, 15 February 1929. Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 630-4.

[66] Bontemps and Conroy, *Anyplace But Here*, 206; Faucet, *Black Gods of the Metropolis*, 43.

may have also been irritated that such transactions were impossible for him to regulate, even if they did attract new converts.

Ali thus issued regular messages to the believers instructing them to stick together and ignore the accusations of the movement's detractors. Most of these detractors go unnamed in the prophet's warnings, though in one piece he complained that most of his opposition came from local Christian ministers who disapproved of the propagation of Islam among blacks. He was probably also being ridiculed by some black intellectuals who lumped Ali's religion in with the supposedly escapist working-class storefront churches run by former step-ladder preachers. A November 24 *Defender* article which stated that the prophet had received "two prominent visitors from an eastern country" did not silence Ali's critics.[67] The unnamed eastern admirers were reported to have visited in order to congratulate the prophet on his interpretation of Islam and his proselytization work. Moors may have seen this as authenticating their beliefs and putting them in the same class with the black Theosophists and Bahá'ís who employed the services of such "eastern" visitors. Nonetheless, Ali survived these accusations since he had the support of important members of the Chicago political and business elite, including the *Defender*.[68]

In spite of the divisions forming within the Moorish Science Temple, and criticism from rivals, the leaders of the Moorish Science Temple followed up the Moorish convention's display of respectability and acceptance with the

---

[67] "Moorish Leader On Tour Visits Subordinate Bodies," *CD*, 24 November 1928.

[68] E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), 53-4; Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 181, 190-2; "Prophet's Spirit Routs Enemies From Temple," *MG*, 14 September 1928; "Following Our Leaders," *MG*, 23 October 1928; "Caveat Emptor", *MG*, n.d.; "Moorish Leader's Historical Message to America," *MG*, n.d. Noble Drew Ali, "Divine Warning," Box SCM 90-78, Folder 2, MST.

creation of a number of subordinate organizations geared for community uplift. Noble Drew Ali's teenage wife, Pearl Drew Ali, already secretary treasurer of the Moorish Science Temple, also established the Young People's Moorish League. This wing of the movement promoted high-brow activities among Moorish children, to "create interest in educational pursuits and to awaken and cultivate an appreciation for the arts."[69] The Young People's Moorish League resembled the many children's welfare organizations and settlement houses run by upper crust African-American women. However, Pearl Ali was only sixteen and was thus aided by *Moorish Guide* editor Juanita Richardson Bey, a graduate of the respected Wendell Phillips High School. Around the same time the Moorish National Sister's Auxiliary was established as the women's counterpart to the Moorish Business Man's club made up of the men running Moorish laundries and groceries. To be successful the movement had to provide such auxiliary organizations in which rank-and-file Moors could participate.[70]

The Moors continued styling themselves as a respectable community uplift organization with a series of well publicized charity events and meetings with politicians. The Chicago temple held a Moorish Costume ball on January 8 to celebrate the prophet's birthday which was attended by political players such as Oscar de Priest, recently elected to Congress. Louis B. Anderson came also to campaign for another term as city alderman. The *Moorish Guide*, was now running large ads for his re-election which included an order from the prophet for all Moors to support Anderson. Various state representatives

---

[69] "Mrs. Drew Ali Organizes Young Moorish People," *CD*, 1 December 1928.

[70] "The Moorish National Auxiliary Well on Way," *MG*, n.d.; "Business Men's Club of Detroit Making Progress," *MG*, 14 September 1928; "Will Celebrate Prophet's Birthday With Moorish National Costume Ball," *MG*, 26 October 1928; "Mrs. Drew Ali Organizes Young Moorish People," *MG*, 1 December 1928; Wilson, *Sacred Drift*, 34.

and a judge were also in attendance among all the "Sheiks" and Moroccan-style princesses at Unity Hall that night. Four days later Ali attended the inauguration of the new state governor, Louis L. Emerson, in Springfield where he networked and socialized with power brokers from around the country. The *Defender* came along for the ride publicizing the prophet's activities at all these events, perhaps not with quite the same degree of hype and sensationalism the *Moorish Guide* employed, but still with an approving tone which continued to push Ali into national prominence.

However, on February 15 a large crack in the movement's armor came to light in a *Moorish Guide* article announcing the resignation of Claude Greene, Ali's business manager, political advisor, and friend from his post with the Moorish Science Temple. Ostensibly a result of an increased workload due to his position with the Chicago Civic Booster's Club, Greene's move was an embarrassment to the Moors, the prophet being abandoned in favor of a purely secular community organization. Ali may have foreseen the troubles to come, yet he presented a brave face to the curious Moors lurking in Unity Hall corridors when the two emerged from the meeting where Greene had announced his plan to step down. The *Moorish Guide* reported, "Mystery shrouded the whole affair in view of the fact that neither the Prophet nor Bro. Greene Bey would make any public statement. . . both appeared to be in the best of spirits and parted with a friendly adieu."[71]

---

[71] "Bro. Greene Bey Quits Business Manager Post," *MG*, 15 February 1929; "Giving Christmas Toys to Poor Asiatic Children at Moorish Science Temple, December 1928," *MG*, n.d.; "'Elect Anderson'- Prophet," *MG*, 1 February 1, 1929; "Why the Citizens of the Second Ward Will Re-elect Louis B. Anderson, By Claude Greene," *MG*, 1 February 1929; "Will Celebrate Prophet's Birthday With Moorish National Costume Ball," *MG*, 26 October 1929, 1; "Moors to Celebrate Birthday of Founder," *CD*, 5 January 1929; "Birthday of Moorish Leader is Celebrated," *CD*, 12 January 1929; "Greene Heads Chicago Boosters Civic Club," *CD*, 12 January, 1929.

One month later Claude Greene was murdered by a crew of gun and knife wielding henchmen purportedly hired by the prophet. Police claimed Noble Drew Ali, Pearl Ali, and various other members of the Moorish Science Temple were engaged in celebrations at his home that same night, when police arrived to take Ali into custody. A former Moor, Small-Bey, told police a split had occurred among the believers. The Governors and Sheiks of some powerful temples had sided with Greene, who had ordered Ali and his supporters out of their Unity Hall offices four days before the murder. The prophet allegedly had called the Governor of the Pittsburgh temple, Crumby-Bey, to come to Chicago and organize having Claude Greene "bumped off." Police dragged a number of prominent Moors, as well as forty rank-and-file members, to the station house for questioning; Ali was arrested immediately. Noble Drew Ali's rise to prominence within Chicago's African-American social and political circles came to a screeching halt. The *Moorish Guide* ceased publication temporarily and the movement held no more public events until at least September that year. Greene's eviction of the prophet from Unity Hall showed how dire was Ali's need for money and Moorish-owned property. The movement was still just renting their temple spaces and was therefore only barely removed from the street preacher and storefront or living-room churches from which Ali was so desperate to disassociate the Moors. Further, he needed Greene's connections and legitimacy to bolster his own image with the powerful blacks who would fund his movement and legitimize him as a representative of the black vote.[72]

Greene's murder changed everything for the *Defender* which was no longer willing to promote Ali's movement. To the contrary, immediately the

---

[72] "Claude Greene Shot to Death in Unity Hall," *CD*, 16 March 1929; Program for Third Annual National Convention of the Moorish Science Temple, 1930, Box SCM 90-78, Folder 4, MST.

tone of the paper's description of the Moorish Science Temple took an about face. The *Defender* now referred to the Moorish Science Temple as a "religious cult," and publicly humiliated its leader by stripping away the public persona of "President Ali," calling him "Timothy Drew, who styles himself 'Prophet Noble Drew Ali.'"[73] The *Defender* shamed the Moors before all of black America again a week later with a front page story headlined, "Cult Leader Lured Girls to His Harem." Noble Drew Ali now found himself being destroyed like Marcus Garvey, the Black Jews, and the countless Hindoo doctors Robert Abbott ridiculed on the *Defender's* pages weekly. Apparently investigators had begun looking into charging Ali with contravention of the Mann Act prohibiting transportation of underage girls across state lines, and statutory rape, after a fourteen year old revealed she was carrying the prophet's child. She also alleged the prophet had been given a number of other young girls by mothers who were instructed by Ali that "it was holy to have their daughters receive the affections of 'Mohammed's representative here on earth'."[74] Never mind that the *Defender* had happily published a photograph of Ali's sixteen year old wife Pearl Ali, in which she clearly looked her age, and had therefore been complicit in Ali's allegedly immoral activities. The *Defender* held that Ali was forty-three and thus too old for teenage girls. Whether these allegations were true or false, the *Defender* shamed the Moors as they did other storefront religions perceived to behave in ways that rejected respectable behavior and reinforced white stereotypes of immoral, dishonest and violent African Americans[75]

---

[73] "Claude Greene Shot to Death in Unity Hall," *CD*, 16 March 1929.

[74] "Cult Leader Lured Girls to His Harem," *CD*, 23 March 1929.

[75] Like the teenage girls supposedly "given" to the Prophet, Pearl Ali was the daughter of two of Ali's followers, the Foreman-Beys. "Cult Leader Dies, Was in Murder Case," *CD*, 27 July 1929; "Mrs. Drew Ali Organizes Young Moorish People," *CD*, 1 December 1928.

Like other such campaigns, the second element of the *Defender's* nationwide disgracing of the Moorish Science Temple involved accusations of greed and corruption. The *Defender* discredited the Moors claiming the "alleged prophet" had collected $35,000 from followers during 1928. Not only was he greedy, but he was also uneducated, they claimed. Indeed those examples of Noble Drew Ali's signature found on the Moorish Science Temple's incorporation papers show someone with shaky child-like handwriting, contrasting dramatically with the fine penmanship of Claude Greene's signature. However, as will been shown through an examination of his teachings, the prophet was self taught and intelligent. But he had no Tuskegee or Fisk University credentials like Claude Greene. The *Defender* claimed he had become rich by "duping his followers with religious hokum." They alleged further that Ali told his believers Moorish Manufacturing products were blessed by the Prophet Mohammed, an accusation that Moorish Mfg. advertisements certainly do not bear out. But such an association was an attempt to color the Moors businesses as being akin to those of the magic sellers whose advertisements the *Defender* carried each week. Predictably a final insult came in *Defender* allegations that "The ignorance of the crowd following him is appalling." Now that Ali was implicated in the murder of a high profile member of black Chicago society, all his networking and political maneuvering with educated elite blacks amounted to nothing for Abbott and the *Defender* would side with Claude Greene. The characterizations stemming from these early *Defender* reports have dogged the Moorish Science Temple for seventy years, as they have dogged many such storefront religions even when their ranks were filled with respectable working African Americans.[76]

---

[76] Certificate of Registration for Cook County, Illinois, 29 November, 1926, MST. "Greene Heads Chicago Boosters Civic Club," *CD*, 12 January 1929; "Cult Leader Lured Girls to His Harem," *CD*, 23 March, 1929.

One can sense in the *Defender's* post-murder reports that Abbott and his staff were scrambling to cover up their earlier warm relationship with the Moorish Science Temple. Perhaps they had praised and supported the Moors in the paper only as a personal favor to Claude Greene. Perhaps they were mortified that white Chicago might associate the black political elite with murders, and a man who called himself a prophet and wore turbans in public. In an editorial entitled "Murder for Profit" Abbott complained the Mob-style hit crew that had killed Claude Greene showed "we are getting more like white folks every day. . . We need no Al Capone. . . We can get along well without hired murder gangs and even those powers behind the throne that pay the bills."[77] Clearly Abbott was warning respectable blacks to rise above such "white" behavior and take the high ground, since "hired murder gangs" and "powers behind the throne" among blacks tarnished the whole race. Nonetheless, on April 6, three weeks after Claude Greene's murder, Noble Drew Ali's wealth and political connections came in handy when he was granted bail. Against the objections of the coroner's office, a judge in the state prosecutor's office set the prophet free on ten thousand dollars bail. The *Defender* ran an article alleging the Moors had paid the judge off and had used their money and political connections to arrange for a member of the Moorish Science Temple, who was also a city prosecutor, to represent Ali at his bail hearing. The *Defender* announced a planned meeting of the city's newspaper publishers to sign a statement calling for a formal investigation into the court's conduct.[78]

Noble Drew Ali escaped prosecution for the murder of Claude Green ultimately, dying suddenly at his apartment. At the time of his death there was

---

[77] "Murder for Profit," *CD*, 23 March 1929.

[78] "Moorish Head Released in $10,000 Bail," *CD*, 6 April 1929.

not enough evidence to convict him due to the police's inability or unwillingness to track down witnesses and key members of the alleged hit squad that had killed Greene. Lawyers representing Claude Green claimed the prophet had spent seven thousand dollars avoiding a conviction. Ostensibly innocent, the *Defender* nonetheless commented that perhaps Noble Drew Ali's chickens had come home to roost. Having escaped the murder charge he had still received justice, dying as a result of injuries sustained while in police custody. By this the *Defender* insinuated that blacks who flaunted respectable behavior invited police brutality and the disdain of whites. Still the *Defender* reported on the prophet's burial kindly, describing scene and those who attended respectfully. One Moorish-American woman speculated that the Noble Drew Ali's spirit would inhabit his chosen successor, attorney Aaron Payne. Payne had become the movement's new business manager and may have been the lawyer who represented Ali at his bail hearing since he was assistant city prosecutor at the time. Another told the paper, "The Prophet was not ill; his work was done and he laid his head upon the lap of one of his followers and passed out."[79] In spite of all the worldly politics and complications that marked the prophet's final days, he was to many still a prophet of God whose teachings were meaningful.

The five years Ali spent in Chicago do not agree with the *Defender's* characterization of the Moorish Science Temple as a religion which catered to the escapist desires of bewildered and belligerently anti-white Southerners. In fact, the ranks of the Moorish Science Temple were filled with militant but respectable working black Chicagoans. Ali's movement also attracted prominent members of the educated black elite - lawyers, businessmen, and a

---

[79] "Accuse Cops of Laxity in Making Probe," *CD*, 4 May 1929; "Cult Leader Being Held in Murder Case," *CD*, 18 May 1929; "Cult Leader Dies; Was in Murder Case," *CD*, 27 July 1929.

few local politicians. Most of these men and women probably were Southerners who had arrived North looking for a way to express themselves spiritually while living up to their potential as American citizens. Noble Drew Ali appears to have attracted such respectable Chicago residents from every walk of life, straddling the perceived boundaries between elite and working-class black Chicago.

Nonetheless, Ali was unable to accommodate all his followers while retaining control of the movement, the support of the black political machine and the approval of *Defender*. The differences among Moors over appropriate means of proselytization and fund-raising made Ali's movement a difficult one to administer. Eventually these differences spilled over into Ali's relations with his most prominent organizer, Claude Greene, resulting in both men's destruction. The specifics of the Moors' story point to the difficulties faced by any street preacher who attempted to build a large movement. Such a religious entrepreneur needed the energy and participation of activist African Americans who often defied the police and elite black society in their zeal to promote Moorish Science and black rights. Simultaneously, leaders like Ali needed the support of some part of elite black society to endorse and publicize the movement. Lastly, religious entrepreneurs required the money and political connections of Chicago's black political machine in order to be recognized as a block of black votes to be courted and favored. Pleasing and appealing to all these parties at once was an impossible task. Indeed the Moorish Science Temple fell victim to the fluid meaning of respectability in black society in spite of the prophet's successful articulation of a compelling religious creed.

Chapter Three: Moorish Science and the Meaning of Islam

In the late 1930s members of the Moorish Science Temple were known to have adopted an old African-American spiritual to their own beliefs singing "Moslem's that old time religion" at Temple services. The words of this Moorish song reveal the degree to which interwar blacks perceived Islam to be their own. The Moorish song conjures up the entire history of African-American religion beginning in the American South. This history includes a long oral tradition which sees African Americans as a special people in God's eyes, and the power of religion to relieve them from the stresses and dangers of life in a white-dominated country. Though Moorish Science first materialized in Chicago, it was really a religion of Southerners, some still in the South, some transplanted to the cities of the Mid-West and North. The Moorish prophet's innovation was to take existing Southern spiritual beliefs and amalgamate them with twentieth-century interpretations of non-white Eastern culture he found in the North. Noble Drew Ali named the resulting belief system "Islam" drawing on black perceptions of the religion. The black press and oral tradition described Islam as an ancient religion shared by many Africans, whose adherents taught racial equality. Thus to many African Americans Islam was the "old time religion" of black ancestors in ancient Egypt and the Holy Land. Moors saw nothing inappropriate about their interpretation of Islam stressing the need for African Americans to define the religion of their forefathers for themselves in twentieth-century America.[1]

---

[1] Arthur Huff Faucet, *Black Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1944), 49.

Since Ali's emergence in Chicago in the mid-1920s, both academics and journalists have defined the Moorish Science Temple alternatively as a form of heretical Christianity, or simply as the bizarre invention of disoriented Southern blacks lost in the urban Northern. Others have been swayed by the *Chicago Defender's* portrayal of the movement, and have discounted Ali's spiritual sincerity, claiming Moorish Science was primarily the personal cult of a simple man whose greedy associates have sullied any sacred content.[2] None of these interpretations is convincing, nor do they do Noble Drew Ali and his followers justice as intelligent and genuinely religious people. To understand why Ali's articulation of Islam was so compelling to many African Americans, we must strip away all earlier interpretations and attempt to define and contextualize Moorish Science fully. We must take into account both the practical interpretation of Moorish Science by Ali and his numerous followers in Chicago, and the exact content of Ali's teachings. Chapter Two has already examined the activities of Ali and his followers revealing divisions among them over the definition of respectable behavior and Moorish militance. This chapter takes on the second part of this endeavor and examine Noble Drew Ali's principles in detail. This examination reveals where Ali collected his ideas and why his articulation of his revelation drew from and catered to African-American alternative religious culture in 1920s.

Unfortunately, Noble Drew Ali left no personal papers or autobiography which we could use to reconstruct how his religious ideas were formed, which movements or thinkers inspired him, or how he expected his followers to interpret his revelation. However, we can piece this information together

---

[2] Bontemps and Conroy seem to have built upon the *Defender's* later reports, which shamed the Moors, to depict Ali as a charlatan, his followers as fools. Arna Bontemps and Jack Conroy, *Anyplace But Here* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966), 206.

quite accurately by careful examination of his religious publications, much of which were borrowed from earlier texts. This borrowing allows us to avoid speculation based only on similarities in doctrine between Moorish Science and other religions. Past observers have gone looking for Ali's influences among the small Muslim communities of the interwar urban United States for which there is no direct evidence.[3] These comparisons are misleading because they draw attention away from the direct evidence of Ali's influences that can be found in his writings –influences that were not Muslim. By examining the breadth of his influences a more complicated understanding of Ali's spiritual development emerges, thus avoiding teacher-to-convert models of religious transmission which give the recipient little credit for conceiving of any particular idea independently. This examination will explain how this African-American movement materialized seemingly out of nowhere, independent of any obvious Muslim influence. Indeed, Ali was successful precisely because he presented blacks with an Islam by and for African-Americans.[4]

On first inspection Ali's religious teachings appear to be a perplexing jumble of ideas, symbols, and rituals drawn from disparate sources, namely American New Thought movements, black Spiritualism, African-American popular Orientalism, and the black fraternal tradition. Because the internal logic of Moorish Science is not readily apparent when the religion is taken out of context, most writers have misunderstood and criticized Ali's

---

[3] Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 71-140; Aminah Beverly McCloud, *African American Islam* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 201; Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith, *Mission to America: Five Sectarian Communities in North America* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1993), 197; G. H. Bousquet,"Moslem Religious Influences in the United States." *Moslem World* 25(1935), 43.

[4] Noble Drew Ali, *Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple of America* (Chicago: n.p., 1927), 4.

unconventional mix of ideas since he first began preaching in Chicago in 1925. Yet the internal logic behind Moorish Science is key to understanding why Noble Drew Ali attracted so many blacks involved in African-American popular mysticism and black nationalist movements. His success as a religious leader shows his ideas were reasonable and compelling to a significant segment of Chicago's black community, even though some African Americans nonetheless found Moorish Science strange or suspicious. Further, the prophet's focus on both radical revision of world history and conservative elite morality and behavior was also responsible for his success as a prophet.

Midway through his career in Chicago, Noble Drew Ali published the bulk of his revelation from God in his 1927 work, *The Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple*.[5] A dissection of this work, and the books and sub-cultures Ali borrowed from in writing it, reveals many of the individual elements which constituted the mystical world of 1920s urban blacks. This world was simultaneously intensely political and spiritual, bringing together every aspect of a believer's life and endowing it with sacred significance. To complement his *Koran*, Ali also published a Moorish catechism called "Koran Questions for Moorish Children" which is particularly useful because it encapsulates in simple language those Moorish teachings Ali considered basic to Moorish Science.[6] The questions and answers of this catechism serve to interpret the more obscure *Holy Koran* and reveal the meaning behind Moorish use of Masonic terminology and symbols. I will refer to this second document throughout my analysis when appropriate. Lastly, I will analyze a set of clues Ali left us which point to a mystical Freemasonic connection in Ali's life and teachings. These clues complement the *Koran* and catechism by

---

[5] Ibid.

[6] Noble Drew Ali, "Koran Questions for Moorish Children," repr. in Samuel M. Zwemer, "A Moorish Science Catechism," *Moslem World* 32(1942).

revealing the cultural codes and symbols Ali used in public to efficiently communicate his religion and its authenticity to black Chicago.

These particular works have been selected since they were all published in the five years before Ali's death in Chicago, when his ideas and teachings were presumably the most developed and the movement's reached the height of its influence. I have excluded works written by followers published after the prophet's death. While these newspapers, books and pamphlets are loaded with details worth analyzing, this thesis necessarily must be limited in scope and will focus on the last five years of Noble Drew Ali's life. After Ali's death the splintering of the Moorish Science Temple into competing factions each led by a man claiming to be a reincarnation of the prophet Ali, resulted in some dramatic changes. The internecine violence that resulted in Ali's death, and later the deaths of two white police officers brought the movement under intense F.B.I. surveillance as a suspected subversive organization. This surveillance, the unwanted attention of the Chicago Police Department, and a falling out with the editorial staff of the *Chicago Defender*, caused the Moors to become increasingly secretive. Further, without the prophet present to enforce his interpretation of Moorish Science, reinterpretation by the movement's leaders became pervasive, though rank-and-file Moors had been reinterpreting Moorish ideas to some degree all along.[7]

In an attempt to standardize belief and practice, and consolidate his authority as prophet, Ali self-published his revelation the *Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple* in 1927. This book functioned as the primary religious scripture of the movement. Its teachings were read at Moorish services every Friday and were analyzed by Moors wanting to reconstruct their history. The sixty-three pages of the *Koran* reveal Ali as God's prophet

---

[7] Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience*, 101-5.

sent to save "fallen humanity," namely black America, by revealing the divine potential within each believer and blacks' true history and identity as Moorish-Americans. African Americans were only to realize this potential fully through realization of the unity of all non-whites, or Asiatics, and the conquering of earthly desires. Ali introduces his work by explaining that the *Koran's* stories of Jesus's mystical life in India, Europe, Africa and Egypt, its instructions for divine day-to-day living, and its racial teachings are not new. Rather, he instructs that the *Koran* contains ancient truths held secret by the Muslims of India, Egypt and Palestine, but now revealed to African-Americans through their prophet Noble Drew Ali. Lastly, Ali admonishes American blacks to follow the religion of their ancestors, namely Islam, which he includes in a larger system of right belief and action called Moorish Science.[8]

The parts of the *Koran* we can be relatively sure Noble Drew Ali wrote himself are also those which spell out his beliefs most plainly and consist of a popular, alternative anthropology found in the book's one page introduction and last four chapters. These portions are so specific to Moorish Science Temple doctrine that there is no conceivable way they could have come from another text and Ali most likely wrote them himself, either directly or perhaps through a ghost writer. Ali most certainly drew these beliefs from his own imagination and/or experience of God, filtered through the contemporary African-American popular intellectual tradition of Biblical and historical reinterpretation. These sections of the *Koran* are written in a style that is often awkward and hard to understand, suggesting someone with only limited

---

[8] Faucet, *Black Gods of the Metropolis*, 48. Faucet's description of a Moorish Science service results from his participant observation-style research of the movement in the early 1940s, and is the only study of its kind. Though he described the Moorish Science Temple of ten years after the Prophet's death, it seems likely that, if anything, the *Koran* figured more significantly in Moorish religious life during Ali's days in Chicago.

education. In contrast, the rest of this volume is written in two different but clearly written styles and were plagiarized from two works I will discuss later.

Ali's interpretation of world history was the key to his religious ideas and is expressed in the *Koran* as a popular anthropology which put all non-whites' ancestors at the foundations of Western civilization. In chapter 45 of his *Holy Koran*, "The Divine Origin of the Asiatic Nations," Ali spells out his conception of world history in the following passage:

> 3. The Egyptians who were the Hamitites, and of direct descendant of Mizraim, the Arabians, the seed of Hagar, Japanese and Chinese.
> 4. The Hindoos of India, the descendants of the ancient Canaanites, Hittites and Moabites from the land of Canaan.
> 5. The Asiatic nations and countries in North, South and Central America; The Moorish Americans and Mexicans in North America, Brazilians, Argentinians and Chilians in South America.
> 6. Columbians, Nicaraguans and the natives of San Salvador in Central America, etc. All of these are Moslems.[9]

While the specifics of where each particular national group was to have originated within the ancient Holy Land is unclear, it is apparent that he saw all non-whites as originating together in the lands of the Bible, in particular Canaan. He went on to proclaim his purpose as uniting all these peoples. Sub-Saharan Africans are conspicuously missing from the above roster of the world's peoples. Ali accounts for them later by positing migration from Moab in ancient Canaan into all of Africa by "Old man Cush and his family," who first settled in the Upper Egyptian empire known as Kush. He instructed American blacks that their ancestors and the ancestors of all Africans and Asians are the same, thus divisions between non-whites based on skin color are meaningless and misleading.[10]

---

[9] Ali, *Koran*, 56-7.
[10] Ibid., 57-8.

Noble Drew Ali defined a unique ethnic identity for African-Americans within the ranks of non-whites calling them Moorish-Americans, direct descendants of the ancient Moabites. According to the Old Testament of the Bible, the kingdom of Moab existed as a feisty independent territory which came into conflict with ancient Israel more than once.[11] An artifact, known as the Moabite Stone, discovered in 1868, tells of a Moabite military victory over Israel, knowledge of which was may have been absorbed into the popular black understanding of Biblical history.[12] This being the case, Moabite ancestry would have afforded African Americans with an inspiring past; perhaps Ali chose Moab for this reason. Since the ancient Israelites do not appear in Ali's words on the origins of the world's nations, we can presume he believed them to have been white. This would be an unusual view considering several centuries of African-American biblical interpretation which saw African-American history reflected in the story of the ancient Israelites' bondage and eventual escape from slavery in Egypt. However, according to Ali's revisionist history, the ancient Egyptians, "Old man Cush and his family," were distant kin of modern African-Americans.[13] Thus, for Ali the metaphor of black slavery in Egypt made no sense. Why would Egyptians enslave fellow Asiatics? It could also be the case that Ali chose to ignore this Bible story, focusing rather on the unity of non-whites, adopting only the national names of the Old Testament.

In Ali's history, the Moabites were an independent nation within a larger group he called Canaanites, a group after which he is reputed to have named his first temple. In the book of Genesis, the father of the Canaanites,

---

[11] John L. McKenzie, "Moab," *Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. E. A. Livingstone (New York: MacMillan, 1965), 381-3.

[12] "Moabite Stone," in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 340.

[13] Ali, *Koran*, 58.

Canaan, was the son of Ham and brother of Cush, Egypt, and Put -- all men believed to be founders of Bible-age African kingdoms. The idea of the 'sons of Ham' has a dark history of association with white supremacy and racial separation ideology which sought to find one genetic source for the black race completely divorced from whites. Many white Americans perceived blacks to be the descendants of Ham, cursed by his father, Noah, after allegedly looking at Noah in a sexually inappropriate way.[14] Peter Wilson has said of Ali's reference to American blacks as descendants of Canaanites and Moabites, "Biblical tradition accuses the Canaanites and Moabites of every archetypal sin; Drew Ali's temple-naming was defiant and bold indeed."[15] He may be correct, unless of course Ali had his own interpretation of the Bible, not viewing the Moabites and Canaanites as having committed sinful acts, but as proudly competing for power in the ancient Holy Land. Moreover, Ali's choice would have had meaning for fellow blacks since, in the African-American folklore surrounding the Great Migration, "Canaan" was a popular name for both heaven and the city of Chicago.[16]

Why did Noble Drew Ali, Muslim prophet, draw from the Bible to explain black history? After all, with Ahmadi Muslims actively distributing English translations of the original Qur'an in American cities, and with a number of

---

[14] Charles B. Copher, "Three Thousand Years of Biblical Interpretation with Reference to Black Peoples" in *African-American Religious Studies: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, ed. Gayrude S. Wilmore (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1989), 111-2, 117-9.

[15] Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Sacred Drift: Essays on the Margins of Islam* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1993), 17.

[16] Peter Wilson reports that, according to a number of Moors he has spoken to, the first Moorish Science Temple, named the Canaanite Temple, was founded by Noble Drew Ali in 1913 in Newark, New Jersey, shortly after Ali experienced his revelation. However, I can find no evidence of any temples outside Chicago before 1925, and this temple may only be another detail in the rich popular tradition surrounding the obscure early years of Ali's life. Ibid.; McKenzie, "Put," *Dictionary of the Bible*, 708; Milton C. Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 60.

other translations available at American bookstores, Noble Drew Ali could have presented his followers with the Qur'an if he chose to do so. Most importantly, the Bible was a familiar text to many American blacks. It permeated popular culture to the point that Ali could place African-American heritage and history in biblical terms and be fully understood. Indeed, he may not have drawn his alternative history from the Bible with such premeditation; it may simply have been automatic for him to do so having lived all his life in a largely Christian country. In contrast, the Qur'an was largely unknown to Americans, who would have been unfamiliar with the context in which it was revealed and had no local tradition of interpretation to which to refer. Ali may also have known that the Bible is considered by Muslims to have been an earlier revelation than the Qur'an, but still a valid one. The Qur'an does not negate the value of the Bible which is perceived to have been meant for a different group of people living in a different era. Noble Drew Ali perceived his revelation, in the form of his *Koran*, in the same way.[17]

The descendants of the Moabites and Canaanites existed in brotherhood with all non-whites, as Asiatics, according to Noble Drew Ali. In 1920s America the term Asiatic was used to describe non-white peoples from the Middle East or the Indian sub-continent, including all the "Hindoos" described by the *Chicago Defender*, regardless of their religious persuasion. Ali wrote that American blacks were properly known as Moorish-Americans, a sub-group of the Asiatic 'nation,' giving African Americans a hyphenated identity akin to those of the Irish, Polish, and Italian-Americans, etc. whose parents had been flooding into the United States for decades. In his own 1920s-style of political correctness, Ali threw his own title, Moorish-American, into the contemporary, and still on-going, debate among blacks over the social and

---

[17] Ali, *Koran*, 2, 57-59.

political meanings of terms such as "Negro," "black," "colored" and "Ethiopian." Many other blacks had arrived at the conclusion that these labels served only to mark African Americans for discrimination by describing them as categorically foreign to the United States. Ali's Moorish-American identity was predicated on finding a place for blacks in the United States alongside all other ethnic Americans by finally defining their history, home country and cultural distinctiveness.[18]

Ali linked Moorish-Americans to the ancient Moabites by stating that Moorish-Americans were "descendants of Moroccans and born in America."[19] Morocco, Ali wrote, had become the home of the Moabites in recent centuries. Archaeologists have surmised that the kingdom of Moab was eventually conquered or destroyed by a natural disaster. Perhaps knowing this, if it was known at all in the 1920s, Ali accounted for blacks' arrival in West Africa by positing a migration of the biblical Moabites from Egypt across the African continent to the Atlantic Ocean. There they founded the "Moroccan Empire" which spread from Morocco to rule over most of Africa as well as the Americas and "Atlantis Islands" before the Atlantic Ocean was created by a massive earthquake that cut the Moors off from their distant dominions.[20]

Noble Drew Ali's plan to identify African Americans with Morocco was an astute one. Unlike virtually every other state in Africa, Morocco, along with Ethiopia and Liberia were the only states to resist colonial domination. Though Morocco had become a French protectorate in 1912, it still stood as a nominally independent state with formal diplomatic relations with the United States. Ali planned for Moorish-Americans to benefit from the type of protection afforded other immigrants by their home countries' embassies and

---

[18] Ibid., 58; Ali, "Koran Questions," 59.
[19] Ali, "Koran Questions," 56.
[20] Ali, *Koran*, 58

consulates in the US. Ali's belief that nominal citizenship in a foreign state could protect African-American civil rights in the United States resembled the theories of another contemporary movement, namely Zionism. European Jews had for some years been lobbying for an independent state to which they could flee if necessary, and whose government could protect Jews in other countries. While Ali probably was not influenced by Zionist thinkers, his formulation of Moorish-American identity was certainly contemporary with the growth of similar kinds of nationalist movements in Europe and the Middle East.[21]

Ali's belief that Moroccan subjects could and did enjoy special rights in the United States not allowed African Americans was not far fetched. African-American popular culture contained stories of North Africans escaping racial discrimination in the United States. For example, in his classic and influential work of uplift ideology, *Up From Slavery*, Booker T. Washington remarked favorably upon an 1879 incident whereby a black man was refused service in a white-owned hotel in an unnamed Southern town. Because he spoke English, the man in question was assumed to be African-American. However, after he managed to prove his Moroccan citizenship, hotel staff apologized and granted him service.[22] This book was very well known to African-Americans who perhaps recognized that while many Moroccans were ethnically Arab, enough of Moorish or Moroccan citizenry was black or of mixed ancestry that the exact racial characteristics of a Moor were fluid, as were American perceptions of African, Turkish, Arab or "Hindoo" identity. Moorish-American identity had

---

[21] Michael McCarthy. *Dark Continent: Africa as Seen by Americans* (Westport, Conneticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), 79; Luella J. Hall, *The United States and Morocco, 1779-1956* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1971), 661-3.

[22] Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery* (1901, repr. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 60.

one final advantage for African-Americans. In discussing Ethiopianism in turn-of-the-century America, Hickie and Wylie have astutely surmised that the myths of ancient Egypt and Ethiopia were so compelling to African-Americans since they provided a noble black heritage divorced from stereotyped images of the African savage. Morocco held the same charm for Ali and many other blacks because popular images of privileged Moroccan citizens in the United States provided a modern alternative to the primitive sub-Saharan Negro. Further, Noble Drew Ali's personal revision of African history which saw modern Moroccans as descendants of blacks originally from Egypt and the Holy Land, tied Moorish-Americans to both a respected modern African state and the high cultures of ancient Egypt.[23]

As Moorish Americans, Ali commanded blacks to know the "ancient and divine creed," of their natural religion, Islam.[24] Established by their ancient Moabite ancestors, this religion was a timeless truth which had been called by other names until the life of Muhammad of Mecca in the seventh century when it acquired the name Islam. Ali defined his Islam as "Love, Truth, Peace, Freedom and Justice," - a phrase that was a central part of Moorish-American life.[25] This phrase summed all that he felt African-Americans were being denied by the whites in the US, often by those who were self-proclaimed 'good' Christians. Thus, he wrote,

> 6. We, as a clean and pure nation descended from the inhabitants of Africa, do not desire to amalgamate or marry into the families of the pale skin nations of Europe. Neither serve the gods of their religion, because our forefathers are the true and divine founders of the first religious creed, for the redemption and salvation of mankind on earth.

---

[23] Dennis Hickey and Kenneth C. Wylie, *An Enchanting Darkness: The American Vision of Africa in the Twentieth Century* (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1993), 271.

[24] Ali, *Koran*, 60.

[25] Ibid., 59.

7. Therefore we are returning the Church and Christianity back to the European nations, as it was prepared by their forefathers for their earthly salvation.[26]

Indeed, Ali was espousing racial separatism, yet his use of the term Asiatic and his reconstruction of world history beginning in the Holy Land shows he drew a racial boundary between white and non-white, not simply between white and black. Ali argued Christianity had failed African Americans for centuries because God had designed it for the salvation of whites only. Ali argued Jesus was no "European"-born white, but rather "of the true blood of the ancient Canaanites and Moabites and the inhabitants of Africa."[27] How Ali perceived the role of the Asiatic Jesus in white Christianity is difficult to say. Perhaps Ali saw Christianity as a white misrepresentation of Jesus' teachings. He explained that these teachings had been revived when "Mohammed the First," another Canaanite, founded Islam in the old Moabite city of Mecca.[28] Ali put fellow Asiatics at the centre of this major world religion, calling the modern Arabs of the Saudi Peninsula "olive"-skinned "Angels" sent by God to guard Mecca and "keep the unbelievers away."[29] Prominent populations of Muslims in Africa, known to African-Americans through newspaper reports and local popular culture made Ali's assertions plausible. These ideas about blacks' need for self-determination and independence spiritually were common to many black religions at the time and later Ali would carry them over into his followers' political and economic lives.

Ali saw his Islam as the key to African Americans' self-transformation through a realization of their history, identity, and potential. Moorish-

---

[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 57.
[28] Ibid., 59.
[29] Ali, "Koran Questions," 58.

Americans, "fallen humanity" as he termed them, had only themselves to blame for their status in America. He admonished readers,

> 16. Through sin and disobedience every nation has suffered slavery, due to the fact that they honored not the creed and principles of their forefathers.
>
> 17. That is why the nationality of the Moors was taken away from them in 1774 and the word negro, black and colored, was given to the Asiatics of America who were of Moorish descent, because they honored not the principles of their mother and father, and strayed after the gods of Europe of whom they knew nothing.[30]

The ancient Moabite wisdom of Islam contained in Ali's *Koran* would save Moorish-Americans; however, Moors had only a limited amount of time in which to heed the prophet's warning. He forebodingly warned of the end of time and "the great wrath which is sure to come upon the earth."[31] Unfortunately he did not provide a date for this end, so his followers were left to speculate. Nonetheless, this millennial tone provided a sense of urgency to his prophecy and concluded his *Koran*.

When Noble Drew Ali preached that the wisdom of his *Koran* was not new, he was not mistaken. Indeed, these exact teachings were readily available to his followers in other contemporary religious publications. However, no one seems to have noticed until the 1940s when academics at the Hartford Theological Seminary accidentally identified his writings as having been plagiarized, almost entirely, from two other works. It is fortunate for the historian that Noble Drew Ali did not fancy himself to be a great writer. As a result, the sources of Ali's inspiration are explicitly clear, because he copied these texts word-for-word, page-by-page, with few changes. However, while

---

[30] Ali, *Koran*, 59.
[31] Ibid.

we can know some of what he was reading, determining how he interpreted these texts is a much more difficult enterprise.[32]

The first half of the *Koran* came from a book associated with the New Thought movement which experienced a revival during the inter-war period. This work, *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*, first published in 1908 in London and 1909 in Los Angeles, was one of a series of books which told the story of the mystical Jesus. The mystical Jesus is part of a tradition of apocrypha which views Jesus as only one of a number of "Christs" in world history who have experienced the divine within themselves through mystical learning. Its author, Levi Dowling, professed to having received a number of revelations through a process known as automatic writing whereby one could extract information from the Akashic record. Known alternatively as "divine substance," Universal Mind, or the Book of God's Remembrances, American mystics understood the Akashic record to be an invisible chronicle of every human thought and deed from the beginning of time. The Akashic record could only be accessed by sufficiently spiritually adept persons able to write "automatically" while in a trance-like state. The most famous interpreter of the Akashic record was Edgar Cayce, the noted clairvoyant, renowned primarily for his healing powers, but also known to have received readings from the Universal Mind similar to that found in the *Aquarian Gospel.*[33]

---

[32] Edwin E. Calverley, "Negro Muslims in Hartford" *Muslim World* 55 (1965): 343-5; Frank T. Simpson, "The Moorish Science Temple and its 'Koran'" *Moslem World* 37 (1947): 56-61.

[33] For students of New Thought and some black Spiritual faiths there is a distinction between the Christ and Jesus, who became a Christ through his spiritual transformation. Christs of other ages include the Buddha, Machelzidek, Zoroaster. Eva S. Dowling, "Introduction" in Levi Dowling, *Aquarian Gospel: the philosophic and practical basis of the religion of the Aquarian Age of the world* (1907; repr. Marina Del Rey: California: DeVorss & Co., 1972), 16; J. Furst, *Edgar Cayce's Story of Jesus* (New York, 1968). Janet Bock has discussed the belief among some Indian Swamis that "Jesus was a great yogi." Janet Bock, *The Jesus Mystery: Of Lost Years and Unknown Travels* (Los Angeles: Aura Books, 1980), 50; Charles Braden, *These Also Believe: A*

The Akashic record was key to New Thought understandings of the continuity of human history and the divine potential in each person. It is not surprising that widespread belief in the Akashic record, spiritualism, seances, and channeling coincided with the development of the telegraph and telephone, and radio broadcasting thereafter, all of which involved invisible means of information transmission. Shawn Trimble has argued that the interwar period, in particular, was marked by "elaborate metaphysical speculation and inquiry into unorthodox science and history in ways that were not inclusive to traditional Christian belief."[34] Noble Drew Ali was engaged in exploration of unorthodox histories, and like many New Thought adherents, believed in the ability of all humans to tap into the essence of God within themselves and to access wisdom and methods of communication beyond normal experience. The *Aquarian Gospel* was "highly influential" during this period and encapsulated the growing hope for humanity's rebirth in a more spiritually evolved form in the coming Aquarian Age.[35] Dowling's *Gospel* was also very influential and popular among African-American Spiritualists who, like Ali, favored the term "science" for their formulation of ancient black spiritual wisdom. Black Spiritualist churches used titles such as "Divine Science" and "Holiness Science" in their belief that the laws behind the workings of the blind forces of the universe and God's plan for humanity could be rationally observed and documented.[36] Thus, spiritual knowledge was

---

Study of Modern American Cults and Minority Religious Movements (New York: Macmillan, 1949), 138.

[34] Shawn Michael Trimble, "Spiritualism and Channeling" in *America's Alternative Religions*, ed. Timothy Miller (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 334-5.

[35] Trimble, "Spiritualism and Channeling," 334.

[36] Robert S. Ellwood, Jr., *Alternative Altars: Unconventional and Eastern Spirituality in America.* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 87; Braden, *These Also Believe*, 128-9; Baer, 92.

a truth to be *known*, as opposed to the perceived-lies of white Christianity which blacks had been *believing* for centuries.[37]

Levi's *Aquarian Gospel* foretold of a day when all men would shed their human bodies and become divine. He communicated this message by way of a retelling of the lost years of the life of Jesus Christ. The New Testament does not account for the eighteen years of Jesus's life between the ages of twelve and thirty. Dowling's work addressed this omission and presented an alternative history and interpretation of Jesus Christ whereby Jesus traveled during these lost years through Egypt, India, and Tibet gaining invaluable spiritual wisdom from Buddhists, Hindus and scholars of "Egyptian Mystery Schools." After discovering how to overcome his human self, Jesus returns to the Holy Land where he is persecuted, then crucified. Jesus' death on the cross is crucial to the story since it precipitates Jesus's human death and divine rebirth. Afterward he returns to Egypt, India and Tibet to revisit his teachers and disciples in his divine form. He promises that each human will someday discover his or her own divinity and be reborn as spirit, one with God. The life of the mystical Jesus differs from the conventional Christian interpretation of Jesus in seeing truth in all the worlds religions. Jesus, as one of a number of Christs who have lived throughout human history, reached his divine state of

---

[37] A modern black Spiritualist-Muslim admirer of Noble Drew Ali has explained Ali's use of the word "science" thusly, "The word "science" represents Noble Drew Ali's . . . belief that the black man's true culture is science, meaning Al Islaam is a science and through this science the black man can be independent of the white man in solving his problems. . . The use of the word science is based upon the belief that everything finds its roots in mathematics. All the questions in the universe can be answered through the application of the 360 degrees of knowledge contained in the universe." Sayyid al-Imaam Isa al-Haadi al-Mahdi, *Who Was Noble Drew Ali?* (Brooklyn, New York: Ansaaru Allah Publications, 1988), 16.

advanced spiritual understanding through self discovery and mystical pursuit, not by the will of a distant God.[38]

The *Aquarian Gospel's* telling of the story of the mystical Jesus was comforting and inspiring to many Americans disillusioned with conventional Christianity and seeking to unlock their own divine potential in order to heal themselves, become more successful or self-fulfilled. In fact the story of the mystical Jesus has a long history among middle and upper-class whites through Christian-centered mystical interpretations of Asia and the Middle East.[39] Though Dowling made no reference to it, in all probability the *Aquarian Gospel* was inspired by another text, *La Vie Inconnu de Jesus Christ*, by Russian explorer Nicholas Notovitch.[40] Claiming to have visited a remote Tibetan monastery in the 1880s, Notovitch published a French translation of what he claimed were Pali manuscripts translated by monks there which told of a Saint Issa, or Jesus, who came from the west many centuries earlier. Published in 1890, this book is but one in a series of popular retellings of Jesus apocrypha, each explaining itself as the product of travel to the exotic mystical lands of Asia.[41] One finds in all these accounts the same basic

---

[38] Ibid. It is popularly believed this portion of the New Testament was edited out of the final text by leaders of the early Christian Church struggling to gain authority over an expanding membership. Bock, *The Jesus Mystery*, 4-5.

[39] Bock, *The Jesus Mystery*, 4-5; "Jesus," *Harper's Encyclopedia of Mystical and Paranormal Experience*, ed. Rosemary Ellen Guiley (San Francisco: Harper, 1991).

[40] Bock, *The Jesus Mystery*, 2-5; Wilson, *Sacred Drift*, 19.

[41] Bock, *The Jesus Mystery*, 2-5, 20-1, 23. Janet Bock's volume, *The Jesus Mystery* is in fact a prominent example of a modern retelling of the story of the mystical Jesus. Desiring to investigate the *Aquarian Gospel* and the earlier Notovitch text, Bock and her husband trekked through India and Tibet speaking with a number of Swamis and religious leaders regarding the tradition of Jesus there. She also lists two further books published by men who travelled to Tibet in search of the same manuscripts which she says may be lost now. Indeed, the *Aquarian Gospel* is unusual in that its source was automatic writing, rather than travel experiences. Wilson, *Sacred Drift*, 19. I must give credit here to Wilson's excellent discussion of the *Aquarian Gospel*

structure, namely voyages undertaken by spiritually-adept Westerners to points East where they discover ancient, pure wisdom previously overlooked or suppressed by conventional Christian theologians. African-American Spiritualists adopted Eastern identities or told similar mystical-travel stories to authenticate their teachings or magic.[42] Noble Drew Ali's retelling of the *Aquarian Gospel* and his own story of travel to Morocco and Arabia would have been authentic and familiar to most African Americans. Indeed, blacks had developed their own parallel representations of the mystical East by absorbing white middle-class mysticism into black religious culture for years.

There is one other rendition of the life of Jesus which is significant, which Ali must have known of although he did not use it in his own work. Those same Ahmadiyya missionaries who owned and operated a mosque on South Wabash Avenue in Chicago advertised Islam by appealing directly to African Americans' perception of Jesus. In the late 1950s, Charles Braden noted that the Ahmadiyya used a pamphlet, *The Tomb of Jesus*, to argue Jesus had not been the son of God, but rather one in a line of prophets which culminated in the Ahmadi prophet, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad.[43] This work detailed the belief that Jesus had survived crucifixion and lived for another few decades in India. And in fact there is a saint shrine in Srinagar today at which Muslims pay their respects to a Saint Issa, namely Jesus Christ. The Ahmadiyya perhaps saw themselves as having the most authentic version of the story of

---

and the larger tradition of the mystical Jesus for pointing in this direction for the analysis of Ali's Islam.

[42] Claude McKay, *Harlem: Negro Metropolis* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1940), 73-81; Victoria W. Walcott,"The Culture of the Informal Economy: Numbers Runners in Inter-War Black Detroit," *Radical History Review* 69(1997), 46-75; Walcott, "Mediums, Messages, and Lucky Numbers: African-American Female Spiritualists and Numbers Runners in Interwar Detroit," in *The Geography of Identity*, ed. Patricia Jaeger (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 273.

[43] Charles S. Braden, "Moslem Missionaries in America," *Religion in Life* 28, no. 3 (Summer 1959), 337.

Jesus's travels, having brought it directly to America from its perceived-source in India. These missionaries in the United States may have believed that acceptance of their version of the life of Jesus by Americans, both white and black, would facilitate conversions to their Islamic sect. Indeed, they may have focused their missionary activity on Americans who were dabbling in Eastern religions and who had perhaps become interested in the mystical Jesus through reading the Dowling's *Aquarian Gospel.* In an attempt to compete for converts in the American religious economy, by the 1950s and probably much earlier, the Ahmadiyya were referring to Notovitch's *La Vie Inconnu de Jesus Christ*, and a Rosicrucian work called *The Mystical Life of Jesus* by H. Spencer Lewis, as corroborating evidence for their story of Jesus.[44] Therefore, it is likely that in 1920s Chicago, one could find Indian Muslims who were engaging themselves in the American debate over the mystical Jesus. Further, since we know that Ahmadi Muslims were active in the UNIA and perhaps among some black Spiritualists as well, Ali was probably aware of the Ahmadi Jesus. As such, it is not surprising Ali found no contradiction between his Western-mystical understanding of Jesus and Islam.[45]

---

[44] Braden, "Moslem Missionaries," 338.

[45] The Ahmadi attention to Notovitch's book is hard to understand since his version of the events contradicts theirs, seeing the crucifixion as key to understanding the divinty of Jesus and placing Jesus in India before his thirties. However, Ahmadi doctrine agrees more fully with the Lewis's *Mystical Life of Jesus* which argues that there is irrefutable evidence Jesus was crucified. However, Lewis holds that Jesus's transformation on the cross was only mystical in nature, such that he was able to live out his life afterward secretly with his disciples in Galilee, never visiting India or Tibet. Published in 1929 after his own spiritual and physical pilgrimage to the Holy Land and Egypt, Lewis's version of the mystical Jesus is introduced with an 'artists rendition' of "Jesus, The Aryan Gentile." Certainly Lewis and Noble Drew Ali would have disagreed on the racial characteristics of Jesus and many other subjects also. H. Spencer Lewis, *The Mystical Life of Jesus* (San José, California: AMORC, 1929); Charles Braden has speculated that the Ahmadiyya may have gotten their belief in Jesus's life in India from the Notovitch book. Braden, "Moslem Missionaries," 338; McCloud, *African American Islam*, 201; Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience*, 113.

Ali engaged in the debate over the mystical Jesus, by adapting Dowling's Jesus to his own conception of world history and the black community he sought to serve. Copying numerous chapters from the *Aquarian Gospel*, Ali changed all references from "God" to "Allah," choosing to use the Arabic word which, though it holds the same meaning, may have seemed more authentic to him. There were further changes here or there, the meaning of which are hard to discern. For example, a passage in the introduction to the *Aquarian Gospel* called "Man" became Chapter One in Ali's *Koran*, "The Creation and Fall of Man."[46] Within this chapter Ali changed Dowling's line, "Creative Fiat gave to man, to spirit man, a soul that he might function on the plane of soul," to "Creative Fate gave to man. . ." in his *Koran*.[47] We can only speculate on the meaning of changes such as these, though obviously Ali felt the term "Fate" articulated his own ideas more precisely than "Fiat." However, considering Ali never made these changes or his use of Dowling's work public, their significance to Ali will probably never be known.

However, we can be certain of Ali's interpretation of some parts of Dowling's work. Ali obviously saw himself described in the first pages of the *Aquarian Gospel* where Eva S. Dowling, Levi's wife reprinted another of her husband's manuscripts, "Cusp of the Ages" in her introduction. This essay documents separate automatic writing sessions which predicted the coming of a new Christ for the Aquarian Age who would impart crucial spiritual knowledge upon a waiting humanity, as Jesus the Christ had done centuries before. Levi proclaimed,

> This age will be an age of splendor and of light, because it is the home age of the Holy Breath; and Holy Breath will testify

---

[46] Levi Dowling, "Man" in Eva Dowling, "Introduction," in Dowling, *Aquarian Gospel*, 17; Ali, *Koran*, 4.

[47] Ali, *Koran*, 4.

> anew for Christ, the Logos of eternal Love.
>
> At first of every age this Logos is made manifest in flesh so man can see and know and comprehend a Love that is not narrow, circumscribed.[48]

Dowling called "Cusp of the Ages," his "divine commission," as the new Christ.[49] Noble Drew Ali interpreted these words as an articulation of his own divine revelation. Filled with a sense of prophetic mission, the words "Christ, Logos of eternal Love," spoke to his belief in a coming age of African-American renewal, of "splendor and of light," with himself as Logos, channel to the Holy Breath.[50] Indeed, in the Moorish catechism, "Koran Questions for Moorish Children" Ali describes himself as "Allah's Prophet." Question number six asked "What is a prophet?" The answer: "a Thought of Allah manifested in flesh," echoing Dowling's Christ-Logos "made manifest in flesh" above.[51] Ali defined "Holy Breath" in his catechism alternately as "Truth" and "Allah."[52] Ali drew from Eva Dowling's introduction describing God and divine truth to be one in the same. For Ali this truth was not simply the unchanging laws of the universe or God's will, as Eva Dowling defined it. Rather this truth was Moorish history and heritage which had been kept from American blacks for centuries. Ali reinterpreted the contents of the *Aquarian Gospel's* introduction as foretelling his prophetic purpose of revealing to African-Americans their true identity, history and divine potential which would soon be realized in a golden era corresponding to the Aquarian Age.

In spite of his plagiarism of the *Aquarian Gospel,* Ali probably did not discover his calling as prophet while reading Dowling's work. Rather, Ali

---

[48] Levi Dowling, "Cusp of the Ages" in Eva S. Dowling, "Introduction," in Dowling, *Aquarian Gospel,* 15.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ali, "Koran Questions," 55-59; Eva Dowling, "Introduction," in Dowling, *Aquarian Gospel,* 12-16.

[52] Ali, "Koran Questions," 55-59.

likely conceived of himself as a prophet at some earlier point, seeing the *Aquarian Gospel* as a convenient articulation of his own beliefs. Noble Drew Ali drew from the American tradition of the mystical Jesus to authenticate his prophethood with a spiritual-travel story akin to the mystical travel stories of Notovitch and Lewis. According to oral tradition, Ali had been given a "commission" by the King of Morocco to teach American blacks about Islam. Ali is said to have joined the merchant marine and traveled to Morocco, Palestine, Egypt, and Arabia.[53] Ali reported that during these travels he had been given the title of "Noble" by the "Queen of England", and the name Ali by Sultan Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud of the powerful Saud family of Saudi Arabia, a man whose image appears on the second page of the *Holy Koran* across from a photo of Ali himself, which lent Ali an exotic air similar to that enjoyed by the "Hindoo" mystics and other Eastern-style spiritual advisors of the era.[54] Though he did not visit Tibet, India, the Middle East or North Africa in all probability, Ali still told followers he had sought out Islam and the truth in the mystical East.

Ali found more truth contained in the introduction to the *Aquarian Gospel.* Chapter One of the *Koran,* mentioned above as taken from Dowling's essay "Man," mirrored Ali's explanation for the perceived sorry state of African-American society. Dowling's "Man" spoke of such suffering as a necessary state which would promote self-transformation spiritually and physically. Dowling wrote that this was possible because of the divine essence within each human, "So spirit-man, as seed of God, held deep within himself

---

[53] Adib Rashad, *Islam, Black Nationalism, and Slavery: A Detailed History* (Beltsville, Maryland: Writer's Inc., 1995), 166; E. U. Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: The Search for an Identity in America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 34.

[54] Rashad, *Islam, Black Nationalism, and Slavery,* 166; Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism,* 34; Ali, *Koran,* 2.

the attributes of every part of God."[55] Ali placed this explanation at the beginning of the *Holy Koran* to contextualize the story of Jesus's illumination and transformation, and to explain to his converts why urban black culture was marked by addiction, family breakdown, poverty and discrimination. Ali, borrowing from Dowling, advised Moorish-Americans,

> Without a foe a soldier never knows his strength, and thought must be developed by the exercise of strength. . . But man will regain his lost estate, his heritage; but he must do it in a conflict that cannot be told in words. . . When man has conquered carnal things his garb of flesh will then have served its purpose well and it will fall; will be no more.[56]

Noble Drew Ali saw the "higher self" or soul as the divine essence within each man. The lesson of Islam was knowledge of both the higher and lower selves. Within the context of 1920s black Chicago, with its vice district, gambling houses, unemployment and racial tensions, Ali's metaphor of the overcoming of the lower, carnal self presented a way for blacks to raise themselves above a difficult situation. Ali argued that with his help, each Moor would tap into the divine essence within and undergo a spiritual transformation through overcoming the temporal world and the carnal self to experience peace and abundance in life.

With the meaning of life thus established, Ali then turns his attention to the main body of Dowling's *Aquarian Gospel* which details Jesus's life and travels in Africa and Asia. The lessons of the mystical Jesus rang true to Ali's conceptions of world history. Dowling's Aquarian Jesus visits Asiatic lands, including Egypt, India and Tibet, in each place learning valuable and ancient secret wisdom, and winning pupils of his own, including one "Prince

---

[55] Dowling, "Man," in Eva Dowling, "Introduction," in Dowling, *Aquarian Gospel*, 18; Ali, *Koran*, 4.

[56] Ali, *Koran*, 5.

Ravanna" who resembled the many self-styled Indian princes and mystic advisors who toured America in the 1920s. Eventually, upon Jesus's return to the Holy Land, his arrest and crucifixion, his understanding of the divine within himself enables Jesus to undergo a physical and spiritual change. Afterwards Jesus appears "fully materialized" to his old teachers and students around the world, proclaiming,

> The problem of the ages has been solved; a son of man has risen from the dead; has shown that human flesh can be transmuted into flesh divine. . . .
> To you I come, the first of all the race to be transmuted to the image of the AM.
> What I have done, all men will do; and what I am, all men will be.[57]

Ali changed Dowling's "AM" to "Allah," the word he preferred for expressing the idea of God. Did Ali believe that all African Americans could literally rise from the dead? Perhaps, however I believe Ali saw the crucifixion and resurrection from a black Spiritualist or New Thought perspective, as did Dowling. The crucifixion of the mystical Jesus differed from the traditional Christian Jesus in that Jesus achieved perfection not by the work of God, but by his own learning and realization of his own divine potential. Ali interpreted African-Americans' ignorance of their identity and heritage as a state of psychological death from which they could rise through Islam and Moorish Science. The knowledge Jesus had needed lay in the lands of the Asiatics. Like Jesus, African-Americans had within themselves this potential for transformation also, if only they would learn the lessons of their own Asiatic forefathers.

Though Ali's plagiarism is clear, he did contribute something new to this tradition of the mystical Jesus through his own retelling and

---

[57] Dowling, *Aquarian Gospel*, 261.

interpretation of the story in his *Holy Koran.* In response to discussions surrounding the source of the *Holy Koran*, a fellow Moor, José Vittorio Pimenta-Bey has denied Ali's word-for-word borrowing claiming that the *Holy Koran* and the *Aquarian Gospel*, "were both part of a continuum of ancient sources."[58] Without ignoring Ali's plagiarism, I would have to agree that both Ali's and Dowling's use of the mystical Jesus formed parallel strains of a continuum of popular American mysticism. However, rather than posit some simultaneous transmission from the Universal Mind to both Ali and Dowling, we should investigate Ali's plagiarism since it makes the source of Ali's ideas explicitly clear. Though it may make apologists for African-American Islam uncomfortable, Ali's appropriation of the *Aquarian Gospel* shows that his religion owes much to black Spiritualism. The tradition of the mystical Jesus within black Spiritualism, along with the African-American ideology of Ethiopianism, go a long way in explaining the thriving "Swami" and Spiritualist-advisor industry in interwar America and Ali's own legitimacy with respectable blacks, including the editorial staff of the *Chicago Defender.*[59]

Ali continued with his lessons of mystical self-help with the second half of the *Holy Koran* which contained practical rules for daily living and happy relationships with family, friends, employers, politicians. The source of these teachings was yet another book associated with New Thought, as well as some American mystery schools. Known alternatively as *Unto Thee I Grant* or *Infinite Wisdom*, this text purported to contain very ancient wisdom translated from manuscripts found in Tibet in the early eighteenth century. In a tale

---

[58] José Vittorio Pimenta-Bey, "Some 'Myths' of the Moorish Science Temple: An Afrocentric Historical Analysis" Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1996,308.

[59] Wilson, *Sacred Drift*, 19-23; Calverley, "Negro Muslims in Hartford," 343-5; Simpson, "The Moorish Science Temple and its 'Koran'," 56-61.

strikingly reminiscent of those surrounding Notovitch's discovery of the Tibetan manuscripts, the publishers a 1925 edition of *Unto Thee I Grant* recounted the story of an English gentleman commissioned by wealthy patrons to explore Asia. This gentleman came across translations of Tibetan manuscripts in China which local Chinese scholars claimed to have rescued from a number of Tibetan monasteries, "to prevent their being totally lost."[60]

According to this legend supplied by the publishers, the Chinese translators speculated on the author's identity, suggesting perhaps Confucius or other prominent Asian thinkers. However, the preface goes on to present its own legend which places the manuscripts in Egypt between 1360 and 1350 BC, where they were written by Pharaoh Amenhotep IV. Amenhotep is famous in Western mystical and Masonic folklore as the founder of the first great school of mysticism, no doubt the same school into which Dowling's readings of the Akashic record revealed Jesus to have been initiated. The preface elaborates on Amenhotep's legacy to the world: "Reference to any encyclopedia will reveal the fact that this Pharaoh upset the priesthood teachings and idol worship of Egypt by the establishment of a monotheistic, mystical religion, and every authority on the history of religions points to him as the first man in the civilized world to proclaim the belief in one God."[61] This is quite an accomplishment indeed; however, such a popular intellectual tradition was based less on reality than on the contemporary popular Egyptology favored by its publishers, the Ancient and Mystical Order of the Rosae Crucis.

The Rosicrucians, as they are usually called, probably emerged in seventeenth-century Europe, though they claim a history of mystical pursuit

---

60 "Preface: The Strange Story of this Book," in *Unto Thee I Grant*, ed. Sri Ramatherio (1925, repr. San Francisco: AMORC, 1995), i-viii.

61 Ibid., vi-vii.

that stretches back to that secret mystical brotherhood based upon Amenhotep IV's teachings. Probably best defined as a mystery school, the Rosicrucians are known for their fascination with esoteric wisdom and its application for the purpose of spiritual and practical enlightenment. The Ancient and Mystical Order of the Rosae Crucis, or AMORC, is the American branch of this movement which has published a wide variety of books on mystical topics since the nineteenth century. The author of *The Mystical Life of Jesus*, H. Spencer Lewis, was a prominent American Rosicrucian and a prolific writer who published many AMORC manuals and reference books, including his personal interpretation of the mystical Jesus. This text was also available under the title *Infinite Wisdom* published during the 1920s by the de Laurence Company, which placed large advertisements in the *Chicago Defender* and had many African-American customers, many of them Spiritualists.[62]

Ali was drawn to the teachings of *Unto Thee I Grant* not only because of their purported origin in the ancient Egypt of Moorish-Americans' ancestors. Ali also included the practical, though conservative advice contained in this work because it catered to 1920s Chicago perceptions that the urban black community was in a state of disrepair. Ali plagiarized whole chapters of *Unto Thee I Grant* only making minor changes, as he had with the *Aquarian Gospel.* Two sections entitled "Husband," and "Son," for example, Ali reworked in the *Holy Koran*, as "Duty of a Husband," and "The Obedience of Children Towards Their Father" respectively.[63] Further, for instructions on how Moors could heal the whole black community Ali used chapters from *Unto Thee* such as "Brothers," which became "A Holy Covenant of the Asiatic Nation," or "Rich

---

[62] David Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century, 1590-1717* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 99; Wilson, *Sacred Drift*, 21. Calverly, "Negro Muslims in Hartford," 343.

[63] Ali, *Koran*, 34-5; *Unto Thee I Grant*, 23-5.

and Poor," which became "The Holy Unity of the Rich and Poor" in the *Koran*.[64] In short, this portion of the *Koran* presented Ali's version of 'family values' and respectable behavior, admonishing African-Americans to stay employed, support their families, live clean lives, stay unified against mutual enemies, and not challenge the basic structure of society and government. Further, *Unto Thee I Grant* contained ideas akin to Ali's conception of the struggle between the carnal and higher selves. For Ali, this internal battle mirrored the struggle between white stereotypes of the lazy, immoral Negro and respectable black behavior. Like Dowling's *Aquarian Gospel*, *Unto Thee I Grant* discussed the higher self, or divine essence, within each person and methods for accessing it through mystical and practical self-help. Ali constructed *Holy Koran* Chapter 36 from a chapter in *Unto Thee* called, "Of the Human Frame and Structure."[65] He copied this portion into his *Koran* stating, "Know thyself and the pride of His creation, the line uniting divinity and matter; behold a part of Allah Himself with thee; remember thine own dignity; nor dare descend to evil or to meanness."[66] The phrase, "remember thine own dignity" was the key to Moorish Science. It is no surprise Ali found the reputedly ancient-Egyptian lessons of *Unto Thee I Grant* so compelling.

These chapters, like those borrowed from the *Aquarian Gospel*, were again used word-for-word with minor revisions only, such as the use of 'Allah' instead of 'God.' Ali probably took to his grave his plagiarism and the reasoning behind the changes he made. One chapter in particular is intriguing since Ali's purpose in including it, when he omitted other chapters of *Unto Thee*, is difficult to understand. Ali used an *Unto Thee* chapter entitled

---

[64] Ali, *Koran*, 35-37; *Unto Thee I Grant*, 26, 28-9.
[65] *Unto Thee I Grant*, 43.
[66] Ali, *Koran*, 44; *Unto Thee I Grant*, 44.

"Masters and Servants," renaming it "Holy Instructions from the Prophet, Masters and Servants." The chapter opens with the following words:

> Repine not, O man, at the state of servitude; it is the appointment of Allah, and hath many advantages; it removeth thee from cares and solicitudes in life.
>
> The honor of a servant is his fidelity; his highest virtues are submission and obedience.
>
> Be patient, therefore, under the reproofs of thy master; and when he rebuketh thee, answer not again. The silence of thy resignation shall not be forgotten.[67]

One could argue that many African-Americans would perceive these words as an espousal of accommodation to whites. Indeed, those Moors who irritated the prophet and police by accosting whites in the street and preaching at the workplace may have ignored this portion of Ali's *Koran.* Ali may have included this passage in his work specifically for them, as incidents between militant Moors, whites and police were occurring just as the prophet prepared to publish his revelation. Noble Drew Ali, in spite of his radical revision of world history, believed his teachings should be put into practice only in very respectable ways. He also was attempting to associate his religion with the respectability of elite interracial mystical religious groups, such as the Bahá'ís. Thus, it was critical to divorce Moors and Moorish Science from black Spiritualism and the popular militance of black Southerners in order to overcome the cultural barriers he perceived to be preventing blacks from achieving equality in the United States. Ali was not alone in perceiving culture rather than race as the source of inequality. Many respectable blacks, including many of his followers would have agreed with his chapter "Masters and Servants."[68]

---

[67] Ali, *Koran,* 38; *Unto Thee I Grant,* 30.

[68] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1881-1920* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1993), 186-90; Kevin K. Gaines,*Uplifting the Race:*

Noble Drew Ali added one final element, Freemasonry, to his plan for the transformation of black America. Ali's use of Masonry in the articulation of his ideas is evident in a series of symbols and names he used which seem to show residue from Ali's own career as a Shriner and Mason. Noble Drew Ali was attracted to the black fraternal tradition as a formal structural style for Moorish Science because its works of charity, community organization and mutual benefit defined black respectability in interwar urban America. Framing his teachings in the ritual and regalia of black Masons and Shriners, Ali was using existing cultural cues denoting racial uplift and acceptance by respectable black society of all stripes. As we have seen, publicly the Moorish Science Temple behaved largely like a fraternal order holding parades, conventions and evenings of entertainment such as Moorish costume balls and the "Moorish Drama."

It should not be surprising that Ali would draw from the seemingly secular fraternal tradition to articulate his religious ideas since fraternal orders have always had two dimensions to them. While existing publicly as community organizations, fraternal orders are also secret societies whose members never publicly reveal their secret rituals or the meaning behind them, much of which is esoteric and mystical in nature. Freemasonry emerged in Renaissance Europe as the product of spiritual search by men for laws which governed the processes of the universe, particularly events which today we would attribute to accident or chance. This same quest has been pursued more recently by New Thought adherents, Rosicrucians, some black Spiritual churches, Theosophists and countless other American movements. W. Kirk MacNulty has carefully explained why modern fraternal orders have

---

Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 4, 6.

largely lost their mystical purpose becoming secret sources of sacred wisdom in only a nominal sense. He argues Renaissance thinkers believed in,

> vast non-material realms which were not available to ordinary perception but were still considered to be part of the universe as it was then understood. . . Events occurring within these non-material domains were . . thought to have an important influence on the daily activity of human life. . . .The Mysteries were schools which provided knowledge of those non-material realms and of the natural laws operating in them.[69]

He goes on to explain that today the culture of fraternal orders and mystery schools appear strange because they are largely incomprehensible to we who now live in an age of scientific materialism. However, many twentieth-century people, including those who have faith in astrology, many New Age religions, or the powers of psychics are adherents of this pre-modern strain of thought. The hundreds of white magic and Spiritualist advertisements in the *Chicago Defender* show that this strain of spirituality was alive and well in 1920s Chicago. Indeed, it is not really fair to call such beliefs old-fashioned at all since humans persist in believing in such unseen aspects of the universe as well as God. Noble Drew Ali, like most Masons and black Spiritualists, found no contradiction between belief in God and the pursuit of knowledge of the universe's blind forces enshrined in Masonic traditions. Religion and magic coexisted in Masonic lore as they coexisted in the lives of many African Americans.

Ali was one of a small minority of twentieth-century Masons and Shriners who still perceived fraternal orders as mystery schools akin to the Rosicrucian order. Whether Freemasons, Shriners, Elks or Pythians, Ali and the initiates of other orders held in common certain rituals, which a mystical

---

[69] W. Kirk MacNulty, *Freemasonry: A Journey through Ritual and Symbol* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 5.

Freemason would take seriously, other Masons as only symbolic. Freemasonry's central ritual symbolizes the rebirth of humankind through acquisition of secret truths, and their communication to limited numbers of initiates who use such powerful knowledge for the good of all, not for personal gain. The cycle of death and rebirth has appeared in the mythology and spiritual beliefs of every human culture. For Christians, these ideas are played out in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Masons reenact this cycle in the "third degree" ritual whereby the initiate undergoes a symbolic death and rebirth into "Masonic light." By 'seeing the, light,' so to speak, the initiate discovers within himself the spiritual power to learn the further lessons of Freemasonry's other thirty degrees.[70] Kirk MacNulty says that this ritual symbolizes "a primordial disaster, a catastrophic event which results in profound means by which the loss can be made good and the original, blissful, human state restored."[71] The similarities between this transformation and Noble Drew Ali's proposed Moorish-American transformation through Islam are obvious. The "primordial disaster" of African Americans' enslavement and post-emancipation suffering in urban America may have been interpreted by some black Masons as a reflection of the symbolic catastrophe preceding Masonic rebirth. Whether Ali's vision of uplifting of "fallen humanity" was initially inspired by the lessons of Masonry, Dowling's mystical Jesus, the Rosicrucian lessons of Amenhotep in *Unto Thee I Grant*, or some other source, is impossible to say.[72] But in each Ali found some aspect of his own revelation. No doubt there was some give and take to this process, some of his ideas being

---

[70] Stevenson, *Origins of Freemasonry*, 85. Mircea Eliade, *Occultism, Witchcraft and Cultural Fashions: Essays in Comparative Religions* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 50; Martin Short, *Inside the Brotherhood: Further Secrets of the Freemasons* (London: Grafton Books, 1989), 74-7.

[71] MacNulty, *Freemasonry*, 28-9.

[72] Ali, *Koran*, 60.

intact when he encountered these works, some being directly inspired by them.

The idea of catastrophe followed by divine transformation is a theme that can be found in countless religious traditions. But, as with Ali's other sources, the Masonic tradition appealed to Ali because of its specific interest in ancient Egypt as *the* source of ancient universal wisdom. According to the popular tradition surrounding the prophet, Ali's own career as a Pythian, Mason, and a member of the Ancient Egyptian Arabic Order of Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, or black Shriners, had immersed him in the rich sub-culture of African-American fraternalism.[73] There is ample evidence in Moorish Science documents, regalia, and history of this possibility. The prophet called himself "Noble" Drew Ali, using a title Shriners also put before their names while in the temple or parades, but which he claimed to have received in England.[74] Other Moors were expected to attached the perceived-Moorish and Masonic suffix "El" or "Bey" to their names to mark their nationality. Ali and other male Moors were expected to wear a red Fez at all times, the Fez being a symbol of mystical knowledge to Masons and Shriners, and also to Moors.[75] Resembling Shriners as they appeared in parades, Ali and many other Moors dressed in pseudo-Arab garb which mirrored that worn by "Hindoo" doctors, the King of Zanzibar or the other African and Asian heads of state featured in large photos on the back page of the *Defender.*

Shriner rituals and regalia are particularly rich in popular American interpretations of Arab and Islamic cultures which seek to express the idea of the Orient as a site of ancient wisdom. In a tale reminiscent of Western

---

[73] al-Mahdi, *Who Was Noble Drew Ali,* 81; Wilson, 28.

[74] Wilson, 26; Rashad, 166.

[75] al-Mahdi,*Who Was Noble Drew Ali,* 81-83, 85; Popular tradition holds that Ali wore feathers in his turban to symbolize his Cherokee blood. Wilson, *Sacred Drift,* 28.

traditions of the mystical Jesus, and Noble Drew Ali's own story of mystical travel in the Middle East and Morocco, the Shriners' foundational myth holds that the order's founding members traveled from the West to Mecca. There they received "the secret work," brought it back to America and established the Ancient Arabic Order of Nobles of the Mystic Shrine.[76] This secret work was linked to key founders of the Muslim religious and political tradition since it was reputedly written by Ali, the fourth caliph and cousin of the prophet Muhammad, in 644 AD in Mecca. African-American Shriners employed a similar story claiming the order had been established in 1893 by a group of black Masons under the tutelage of a Syrian, a Palestinian, and a North African who were sent by the "Shrine in Arabia" to spread the order among African Americans.[77] This treatment of Islam was simultaneously a mockery and a celebration. Ali's own story of pilgrimage to Morocco to obtain his commission to spread Islam in the United States also gave him legitimacy through an appropriation of Arab culture and reference to blacks' awareness of similar stories of spiritual travel in the East. Though the Moors and Shriners employed Islamic and Arab stereotypes, Ali and some other mystical Freemasonry die-hards saw the initiation process as serious and personal. They also presented themselves as authentic carriers of Eastern culture who had received their training from Muslims themselves, no doubt irritating those Ahmadi missionaries and other Muslims living in Chicago.

We can be relatively certain Ali was drawing from both general African-American popular culture as well as Shriner culture in adopting the crescent and star to represent his faith. This symbol appeared on Moors' fezzes and on the front page of Ali's newspaper, the *Moorish Guide*, above the word

---

[76] Wilson, *Sacred Drift*, 26-7; Mustafa El-Amin, *Al-Islam, Christianity & Freemasonry* (Jersey City, New Jersey: New Mind Productions, 1985), 119,204.

[77] "Texas Lodge Case to Get Final Airing," *CD*, 2 January 1928.

"Salvation," to represent the ancient truth of Islam. The crescent and star also figured prominently in the symbolism of the Shriners and other Masonic organizations, appearing on their fezzes and other regalia. In addition the crescent and star functioned as a symbol of Eastern mystical knowledge, being found among the symbols and words in psychic and white magic advertisements. These symbols were an obvious choice for communicating the multi-faceted character of the Moorish Science Temple, embodying Moorish nationality, Ali's ancient mystical secrets, fraternal respectability, and Islam.[78]

Ali liked to pose for promotional photographs. In them he is usually seen right hand raised, palm against his chest. It happens this posture is also a Masonic and Shriner oath pose symbolizing honesty and loyalty. Perhaps, by posing this way Ali was attempting to demonstrate to his followers his association with fraternalism as a demonstration of his respectability and the truth of his principles. This pose also implied secret learning and initiation into a select group of the wise. Without any question, Ali saw his revelation in the same terms - ancient wisdom revealed to a select group made special by its ancestral connection to the wisdom's source. Ali offered his Islam only to Moorish-Americans, the rightful heirs of this timeless truth. It was automatic for Ali to decorate his message of the divine within, and blacks' potential to make their own reality with the symbols, structure and aesthetic of black fraternalism. Other religious groups, including the Mormons, many New

---

[78] MacNulty, *Freemasonry*, 6-7; "Let Me Tell You," *CD*, 16 July 1927; "Bungleton Green," *CD*, 19 June 1926; al-Mahdi, *Who Was Noble Drew Ali*, 85; Baer, *Black Spiritualism*, 85-89.

Thought organizations, and black Spiritualist churches, borrowed the structure, decoration and symbolism of fraternal orders to similar effect.[79]

Peter Wilson has called the popular Orientalist representations of Islam and Egypt found in Masonic and Shriner regalia, lingo, ritual and teachings, "the 'hidden' Islamic tradition in western culture."[80] Noble Drew Ali no doubt perceived fraternal culture this way also, seeing its presence among whites as European appropriation and mockery of African and Arab culture. We can surmise this since there is evidence that African-American Muslims have held this view since at least the 1950s.[81] Elijah Muhammad of the Nation of Islam criticized not only white, but also African-American freemasonry, claiming that its symbols and rituals constituted a mockery of Islam. He argued blacks had been sold this mockery by whites making them unable to take their own heritage and the truth of Islam seriously.[82] Noble Drew Ali might have disagreed to argue that the same divine message was to be found in the symbols and terminology of Masonry, if only one had the mystical guidance to see it. In fact, considering the early twentieth-century black interpretation of world history found in Ethiopianist culture, it seems likely that the initiates of many black fraternal orders did perceive their orders to be African or at least non-white in origin.

Noble Drew Ali's ideas show the influence of the white New Thought culture, the African-American fraternal tradition, both the mystical and

---

[79] MacNulty, *Freemasonry*, 27; Loretta J. Williams, *Black Freemasonry and Middle-Class Realities* (Columbia & London: University of Missouri Press, 1980), 65; Braden, "These Also Believe," 138.

[80] Wilson, *Sacred Drift*, 26.

[81] El-Amin, *Al-Islam, Christianity & Freemasonry*, 119; al-Mahdi, *Who Was Noble Drew Ali*, 83-7; Malcolm X, with Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1964, repr. New York: Balantine Books, 1973), 161-2.

[82] Elijah Muhammad, *The Secrets of Freemasonry: That Which You Should Know* (Atlanta: Messenger Elijah Muhammad Propagation Society, 1994), 28-31, 38-9.

practical, and Ethiopianist understandings of Africa, Asia and the Middle East. All these movements and strains of thought came together in Noble Drew Ali's mind because in each he saw the same timeless truth he called Islam. He could have called this truth by another name. Indeed, Ali's religion resembles the doctrine and style of some black Spiritual churches to such a complete degree that one must consider seriously the possibility that Ali had been involved in a black Spiritualist church before starting his own movement. Ali could have called his movement "Moorish Spiritual Mystical Temple," for example, retaining the name "Moorish Science" intact. Instead Ali distinguished himself within the incredibly competitive religious and cultural scene of 1920s black Chicago by using the name "Islam." He also presented a uniquely respectable Spiritualism, run by a man and divorced from popular militancy and the female-led Spiritualist churches associated with gambling, popular magic and the informal economy. Not much of what Ali presented was particularly unique, but his synthesis was just unique enough that he was not branded an eccentric, but rather developed a large, if ephemeral following in half a dozen cities between 1925 and 1929. His appeals to black ideas of race pride and respectability tempered his teachings and drew on sources that held deep meaning for African-Americans, Northern and Southern, wealthy or poor.[83]

Noble Drew Ali's teachings bear little resemblance to Islam being a synthesis of Western-authored representations of Eastern and African

---

[83] In particular, Moorish Science resembles the structure and doctrine of Detroit's Father Hurley Sect which flourished between 1923 and the mid-1940s. Ali's teachings also bear a striking resemblance to some of the theology presented by Marcus Garvey, indicating a much larger tradition of these kinds of teachings which are only highlighted by organized movements such as Ali's and Garvey's. Baer, *Black Spiritualism*, 82-109; Randall K. Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement: The Institutionalization of a Black Civil Religion* (Metuchen, N. J. and London: Scarecrow Press, 1978), 45-62; Wolcott, "Culture of the Informal Economy," 58-61.

religions and cultures. Ali's religion is striking precisely for the absence of any real evidence of contact with actual Muslims, Africans or "Asiatics" of any type, or their texts. If indeed Ali ran into some Ahmadiyya missionaries or other Muslims through the UNIA or simply through living in a number of large American cities, he has carefully hidden it. Yet considering he brashly borrowed from the *Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ* and *Unto Thee I Grant*, both widely popular in black Spiritual and white American mystical circles, and got away with it, it seems unlikely he would have troubled himself with hiding any influence Muslims may have had on him. In fact such an endorsement by Muslims from the East would have been good for Ali's reputation with believers, but would not have been forthcoming from any Muslim due to Ali's claim to prophethood. However, having neglected to use the Muslim texts he could have found in Chicago, Ali perhaps wanted to present an Islam by and for African Americans. Ali's belief in his own prophethood implies this also since prophets usually present themselves as the sole authentic interpreter of God's will on earth in a given place and time.

However, we should not discount Ali's naming of his religion "Islam" as a random choice. This name was meant as a cue to potential converts who already had many conceptions of the religion and its place in black history. Moorish Science's association with black fraternal orders, Morocco, ancient Egyptian wisdom, a multi-racial mystical Jesus, and a prophet who claimed authority from Eastern Muslims, whom he mimicked in dress and name, all made the religion recognizably Islamic in black Chicago. Purists may complain Ali pillaged Islamic culture and replicated offensive popular black Orientalist representations of Muslims. This is true to a degree. However, Ali had to appeal to interwar blacks who accepted these representations as authentic in order to capitalize on Islam's good name among them. Though the

prophet used images of the religion that had already been transformed by Westerners to communicate new meanings, by naming his religion "Islam," Noble Drew Ali contributed to the religious culture which has inspired succeeding generations of African Americans to examine actual Islam for themselves.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Ali, Noble Drew. *Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple of America.* Chicago: n.p., 1927.

_____. "Koran Questions for Moorish Children." repr. in Samuel M. Zwemer. "A Moorish Temple Catechism." *Moslem World* 32 (1942): 55-59.

_____. "Moorish Literature" repr. in *The Holy Koran, Circle Seven*, ed. Malachi Z. York. Brooklyn, New York: Malachi Z. York, n.d.

Dowling, Levi. *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ: the philosophic and practical basis of the religion of the Aquarian Age of the world.* (1907) Marina Del Rey: California: DeVorss & Co., 1972.

Illinois Writers' Project. *The Negro in Illinois.* Vivian G. Harsh Collection, Carter Woodson Regional Library, Chicago.

Moorish Science Temple of America Collection, Manuscripts, Archives & Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York.

Ramatherio, Sri, ed. *Unto Thee I Grant.* San Francisco: AMORC, 1925.

Newspapers

Chicago Defender. 1926-1931.

Moorish Guide. 1928-1929.

Secondary Sources

"Automatic Writing." *Harper's Encyclopedia of Mystical and Paranormal Experience.* Rosemary Ellen Guiley, ed. San Francisco: Harper, 1991.

El-Amin, Mustafa. *Al-Islam, Christianity & Freemasonry.* Jersey City, New Jersey: New Mind Productions, 1985.

Baer, Hans A. *The Black Spiritual Movement: A Religious Response to Racism.* Knoxville, Tenn.: University of Tennessee Press, 1984.

Balyuzi, H. M. *'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh.* London: George Ronald, 1971.

Bey, Hakim. "Moorish Mail-Order Mysticism" *Moorish Science Monitor* 7, No. 2, Autumn, 1994. found at http://www.hermetic.com/bey/mailord/html; accessed August 20, 1998; Internet.

Bock, Janet. *The Jesus Mystery: Of Lost Years and Unknown Travels.* Los Angeles: Aura Books, 1980.

Bontemps, Arna and Jack Conroy. *Anyplace But Here.* New York: Hill and Wang, 1966.

Borchert, James. *Alley Life in Washington: Family, Community, Religion, and Folklife in the City, 1850-1970.* Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1980.

Bousquet, G. H. "Moslem Religious Influences in the United States." *Moslem World* 25 (1935): 40-44.

Braden, Charles S. "Islam in America." *International Review of Missions* 48 (1959): 309-17.

_____. "Moslem Missionaries in America." *Religion in Life* 28, no. 3 (Summer 1959): 331-43.

_____. *These Also Believe: A Study of Modern American Cults and Minority Religious Movements.* New York: Macmillan, 1949.

Burkett, Randall K. *Garveyism as a Religious Movement: The Institutionalization of a Black Civil Religion.* Metuchen, N. J. and London: Scarecrow Press, 1978.

Calverley, Edwin E. "Negro Muslims in Hartford." *Muslim World* 55 (1965): 340-5.

Cohen, Lizabeth. *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Copher, Charles B. "Three Thousand Years of Biblical Interpretation with Reference to Black Peoples." in *African-American Religious Studies: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, ed. Gayrude S. Wilmore. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1989.

Cronen, E. David. *Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957.

Drake, St. Clair. *The Redemption of Africa and Black Religion.* Chicago: Third World Press, 1970.

Drake, St. Clair and Horace R. Cayton. *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City.* New York: Harper and Row, 1945.

Eliade, Mircea. *Occultism, Witchcraft and Cultural Fashions: Essays in Comparative Religions.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1976.

Ellwood, Robert S., Jr. *Alternative Altars: Unconventional and Eastern Spirituality in America.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

Essien-Udom, E. U. *Black Nationalism: A Search for Identity in America.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1962.

Ferraby, John. *All Things Made New: A Comprehensive Outline of the Bahá'í Faith.* London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1957.

Fauset, Arthur Huff. *Black Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1944.

Foner, Eric. "The Meaning of Freedom in the Age of Emancipation." *The Journal of American History* 81 (September 1994): 435-460.

Frazier, E. Franklin. *The Negro Church in America.* New York: Schocken Books, 1963.

_____. *The Negro Family in Chicago.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932.

Friedmann, Yohanan. *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and Its Medieval Background.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

Furst, J. *Edgar Cayce's Story of Jesus.* New York: 1968.

Gaines, Kevin K. *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century.* Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

Gosnell, Harold F. *Negro Politicians: The Rise of Negro Politics in Chicago.*(1935) Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1967.

Greenburg, Cherly Lynn. *"Or Does It Explode?": Black Harlem in the Great Depression.* New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Grossman, James R. *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.

_____. "Blowing the Trumpet: The Chicago Defender and Black Migration During World War I." *Illinois Historical Journal* 78, no. 2 (1985): 82-96.

Hall, Luella J. *The United States and Morocco, 1779-1956.* Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1971.

Harley, Gail. "New Thought and the Harmonial Family." in *America's Alternative Religions,* ed. Timothy Miller. New York: State University of New York Press, 1994.

Hartley, John. *Understanding News.* London and New York: Routledge, 1982.

Hatcher, William S., and J. Douglas Martin. *The Bahá'í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion.* San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984.

Hexham, Irving, and Karla Poewe. *New Religions as Global Cultures: Making the Human Sacred.* Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997.

Hickey, Dennis, and Kenneth C. Wylie. *An Enchanting Darkness: The American Vision of Africa in the Twentieth Century.* East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1993.

Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1881-1920.* Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Hill, Robert S., ed. *Marcus Garvey: Life and Lessons.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.

Hoffert, A. T. "Moslem Propaganda: The Hand of Islam Stretches Out to Aframerica." *The Messenger* 9, no. 5 (May 1927): 141, 160.

"Jesus." *Harper's Encyclopedia of Mystical and Paranormal Experience,* ed. Rosemary Ellen Guiley. San Francisco: Harper, 1991.

Keddie, Nikki R. *Iran: Religion, Politics and Society.* London: Frank Cass, 1980.

Knupfer, Anne Meis. *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood: African American Women's Clubs in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago.* New York: New York University Press, 1996.

Leaming, Hugo P. "The Ben Ishmael Tribe: A Fugutive 'Nation' of the Old Northwest" *The Ethnic Frontier: Essays in the History of Group Survival in Chicago and the Midwest.*, ed. Melvin G. Holli and Peter d'A. Jones. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1977.

Levine, Lawrence W. "Marcus Garvey and the Politics of Revitalization" in *Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century,* ed. John Hope Franklin and August Meier. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982.

_____. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Lewis, Earl. *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

Lewis, H. Spencer. *The Mystical Life of Jesus.* San Jose, California: AMORC, 1929.

Mackey, Albert Gallatin. *The History of Freemasonry: Its Legendary Origins.*(1882) New York: Gramercy Books, 1996.

MacNulty, W. Kirk. *Freemasonry: A Journey through Ritual and Symbol.* London: Thames and Hudson, 1991.

al-Mahdi, Sayyid al-Imaam Isa al-Haadi. *Who Was Noble Drew Ali?* Brooklyn, New York: Ansaaru Allah Publications, 1988.

Malcolm X, with Alex Haley. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X.* (1964) New York: Balantine Books, 1973.

Martin, Tony. *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association.* Westport, Conneticut: Greenwood Press, 1976.

Marty, Martin E. "The Occult Establishment." *Social Research* 37 (1970): 212-230.

Matthews, Fred H. *Quest for an American Sociology: Robert E. Park and the Chicago School.* Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977.

McCarthy, Michael. *Dark Continent: Africa as Seen by Americans.* Westport, Conneticut: Greenwood Press, 1983.

McCloud, Aminah Beverley. African American Islam. New York and London: Routledge, 1995.

McKay, Claude. *Harlem: Negro Metropolis.* New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1940.

Mills, C. Wright. "The Professional Ideology of Social Pathologists" *American Journal of Sociology.* 49 (September 1942): 165-80.

Muhammad, Elijah. *The Secrets of Freemasonry: That Which You Should Know.* Atlanta: Messenger Elijah Muhammad Propagation Society, 1994.

Mumford, Kevin J. *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Ogren, Kathy J. *The Jazz Revolution: Twenties America and the Meaning of Jazz.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Ottley, Roi. *New World A-Coming: Inside Black America.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1943.

Pimenta-Bey, José Vittorio. "Some 'Myths' of the Moorish Science Temple: An Afrocentric Historical Analysis" Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1996.

Philpott, Thomas Lee. *The Slum and the Ghetto: Neighborhood Deterioration and Middle-Class Reform, Chicago, 1880-1930.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Rashad, Adib. *Islam, Black Nationalism, and Slavery: A Detailed History.* Beltsville, Maryland: Writer's Inc., 1995.

Roszak, Theodore. *Unfinished Animal: The Aquarian Frontier and the Evolution of Consciousness.* New York: Harper & Row, 1975.

Rogers, J. A. "Bilal ibn Rahab -- Warrior Priest." *The Messenger* 9, no. 6 (June, 1927):213-214.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism.* New York: Vintage Books, 1978.

Sernett, Milton C. *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration.* Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997.

Short, Martin. *Inside the Brotherhood: Further Secrets of the Freemasons.* London: Grafton Books, 1989.

Simpson, Frank T. "The Moorish Science Temple and It's 'Koran'." *Moslem World* 37 (1947): 56-61.

Snow, Loudell F. "Sorcerers, Saints and Charlatans: Black Folk Healers in Urban America." *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 2 (1978): 69-106.

_____."Mail Order Magic: The Commercial Exploitation of Folk Belief." *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 16, no. 1-2 (1979): 44-74.

Stevenson, David. *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century, 1590-1710.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Stockman, Robert H. "The American Bahá'í Community in the Nineties." in *America's Alternative Religions,* ed. Timothy Miller. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995.

Stovall, Mary E. "The *Chicago Defender* in the Progressive Era." *Illinois Historical Journal* 83, no. 3 (1990): 159-172.

Trimble, Shawn Michael. "Spiritualism and Channeling." in *America's Alternative Religions,* ed. Timothy Miller. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995.

Turner, Richard B. *Islam in the African-American Experience.* Bloomington and Indianpolis: Indiana University Press, 1997.

_____. "Edward Wilmot Blyden and Pan-Africanism: The Ideological Roots of Islam and Black Nationalism in the United States." *Muslim World* 87, no. 2 (April 1997): 169-82.

_____. "The Ahmadiyya Mission to Blacks in the United States in the 1920s." *Journal of Religious Thought* 44, no. 2 (Winter/Spring 1988): 50-66.

Tuttle, William M., Jr. *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919.* New York: Athenium, 1970.

Vincent, Theodore G. *Black Power and the Garvey Movement.* Berkeley, California: Ramparts Press, 1971.

Walcott, Victoria W. "The Culture of the Informal Economy: Numbers Runners in Inter-War Black Detroit." *Radical History Review* 69 (1997): 46-75.

_____. "Mediums, Messages, and Lucky Numbers: African-American Female Spiritualists and Numbers Runners in Interwar Detroit." in *The Geography of Identity*, ed. Patricia Jaeger. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996.

Watkins-Owens, Irma. *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900-1930.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996.

Watts, Jill. *God, Harlem USA: The Father Divine Story.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

White, Shane. "'It Was a Proud Day': African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1741-1834." *Journal of American History* 81, vol. 1 (June 1994): 13-50.

Williams, Loretta J. *Black Freemasonry and Middle-Class Realities.* Columbia & London: University of Missouri Press, 1980.

Wilson, Peter Lamborn. *Sacred Drift: Essays on the Margins of Islam.* San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1993.