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# Modern Black Political Thought Manhattan NY

### By Imam W. Deen Mohammed

W. Deen Mohammed: May we first say peace be on to you, as we always say, is as-salaam alaikum.

Together: Wa-alaikum salaam.

W. Deen Mohammed: I express my appreciation for the opportunity to address a class with the professor here. I have been informed of some of it, things that you would like to hear us speak on or talk about. I want to proceed now to present to you some picture of the organization which is called Nation of Islam Black Muslim many names. Its character, I believe that the character of the organization has determined, the future of our organization where we are right now. It's been determined by the character of the organization.

Many times, a movement has one appearance to outsiders but to an insider has an altogether different appearances. I would say that the nation of Islam as it was called Temple of Islam in the mid-'60s was an organization that hid itself for maybe 30 or 40 years, hid itself from public view for 30 or 40 years. When it decided on the initiative of the leader, Elijah Muhammad, may G-d forgive him his sins, may he rest in peace and have paradise. On his initiative, it was decided that the movement should try to get visibility. I don't know if it was because of the Civil Rights movement during the '60s and the attention that was coming, national attention that was coming to the efforts of the Civil Rights movement. Such organizations, NAACP, Urban League, and all the others that the Nation of Islam decided to try to gain visibility and public recognition for its concerns publicly, but it happened, and we were aware that that was a promotional idea separate from the real idea.

That is there was a desire to give the blacks of America an image of the Nation of Islam that was not necessarily the true make up of the membership itself. The FOI, Fruit of Islam, the military unit of the Nation of Islam. It’s not military in the real sense of military, but militant, like, the many of the civil rights advocates. The military of the Nation of Islam called FOI or Fruit of Islam was used to build that kind of image, the image that was desired for the Nation of Islam, an image of dissatisfied, angry, resolute black membership, but actually the membership of the Nation of Islam was not angry, resolute, yes, but not angry, and not dissatisfied.

In the real sense it was not dissatisfied. It was satisfied because the movement was realizing growth for what it wants. It was realizing growth. It wasn't a angry and dissatisfied movement. What happened, when the movement decided to give this image to itself to attract militant blacks, the aggressive blacks, what it did was change its own (unclear). During the subsequent years from the initial plan to propagate a certain image, build the image to the angry came an influx of members into the organization with that character that was presented to--bring a national attention to the community of Muslims.

We had then a minority of people, members in the organization who really did have that kind of spirit, angry spirit and discontent angry people who wanted to see things happen right away. They were used by the lieutenants, captains and lieutenants to get things done. They were very effective in selling newspapers, selling the Muhammad Speaks, increasing the income, the revenue to the organization that was spent back to propagation or to promoting the image of the Nation of Islam. They were very effective in many other ways, too. Many of them became preachers, ministers and teachers and reformers themselves of the habits of many or the members who needed to reform teachings, those who had given themselves to criminal life or drunkeness and other things of that nature. The point that I want to make here today is that what we saw in the media was not true in terms of what it really was, the make-up, character of the movement.

Now, if the movement was a truly black nationalist movement like many authors wrote, they say, this is black nationalism, Elijah Muhammad's brand was like black nationalism. If it was truly a nationalism, black nationalist movement, then we would expect that it would continue to operate outside of the politics of the United States, and seek to bring political change, a new political movement, a new nation, or exit from America into Africa for new national identity. If it was truly a reform movement then what kind of reforms was it seeking. If it was seeking improvement upon the life of the African-American and saw certain developments in the lives of the African-American community as being detrimental or unwanted, then that reform, realizing its objective, that is, to bring about the man, the ideal black man, would then rest at that point, would rest at that point. If the movement was a workers' movement, if it was seeking material progress, material enrichment for the membership, then once it achieved that it should rest, too. If it was a spiritual movement like, well, I think the spiritual movement of freedom in this country, the African-American movement of freedom in this country. I believe this is essentially a spiritual movement.

If it was a spiritual movement, then I would think it wouldn't rest until the soul is free, until the soul is free, until we are comfortable with ourselves as people in America. What I'm c concluding that—I know we don't have that much time, I’m concluding with that point. That is that the movement called Nation of Islam, the Temple of Islam was essentially a spiritual movement, essentially a spiritual movement. A spiritual movement not in the church sense, a spiritual movement in the sense of intellectual liberation, the liberation of the intellect, the liberation of the human intellect. A spiritual movement in that sense. People who’re deprived of opportunity to get a good education in this country, 1930s, 40s', '50s. People who had their ego crushed by the circumstances that were at that time prevailing in this country and needed a sense, a comfortable sense of identity. They needed to experience intellectual adventure, and all of this was not aware. it was not obvious to them. I don't believe any, - It's hard to find any single one of us who could explain to you exactly what our spiritual needs were.

We would say, "We are Muslims, we want to be Muslims." But what exactly was stirring us, motivating us to follow the Hon. Elijah Muhammad and discipline ourselves and accept a new, completely new life. I don't think most of us could identify exactly what was motivating us, exactly what we wanted, but now many of us can, we realized that what we wanted was to come into the world, civilization, into the world of understanding, into the world of enlightenment.

Our souls needed enlightenment, our minds needed freedom because our souls didn't have enlightenment, and that's essentially what we were, that's essentially what we are today. We are a movement that's trying to continue that process of liberating the soul of the African-American. The only way to liberate the soul of the African-American, in our opinions, is to enlighten the African-American in a natural and sensible way, so the African-American doesn't define his excellence of his worth, in terms of material possession or black militancy, but in terms of the content of his mind, as most of the noted leaders of the black people have told us. That's the need. In terms of the contents of his mind.

Now, I want to bring my talk to a close here and hope that no one will misunderstand what I have said and think that I was saying that there was no nationalistic character to our movement. Certainly, there's a nationalistic character to our movement, but I'm saying, essentially, it was a spiritual movement, and that's why we accepted to separate from the nationalist position, to depart from the nationalist position, and why we accepted to restrain our material appetites and why we deviated from our moral position.

We violated all those disciplines for our spiritual relief, and when the spiritual relief came, we decided that we had to get our moral life back together, and with that came a lot of changes, a lot of drastic changes, because you know a moral interests, or moral devotion, will change everything if necessary, if necessary. Whatever stand in the way of moral commitment, if a person's strongly motivated morally, whatever stands in the way of his moral commitment, he'll try to change it. He'll try to correct it or change it or move it out of his way or move it from his path. That includes the ideology, the ideology, is seen by moral force as being an impediment, as being a hindrance.

It would scrap even that ideology, and that's what we had to. So, if there's any questions, I would like to try to answer them. Yes?

Speaker 2: Do you think its a deliberate movement on the part of media to discredit, even as they will limit, the exposure of Muslims?

W. Deen Mohammed: To discredit?

Speaker 2: To limit the exposure of them to the media.

W. Deen Mohammed: Certainly. Yes, I do.

Speaker 2: Have you all been involved in anything to increase your exposure?

W. Deen Mohammed: Yes. Well, I believe we feel like the most of us feel, that a disservice have been done to our community by the media and given the image that would sell the newspaper or gain them more TV viewers, and not doing justice to what exactly we represent, as other Muslims who chose to stay at the old way, I believe they feel the same and they think that media has no stand. We take the same position that the media, is not bad the media looks for profit. To me, it would do so much for us, so much for justice, and the rest for it is money. That's the world, you know? So we accept that. We do our best to try to reach the public ourselves.

We can't be effective as it could be [unintelligible 00:16:20], I would say media covers adequately on a good percentage, but we are not satisfied just to wait for the media, to do what we think they should do, and that is protecting the interests of Muslims in this country. We tried to do our best to reach the people of this country ourselves. Propagation efforts. Appearances like this one, is a great opportunity right here, today.

Speaker 3: Yes, I would like to go as Muslim or Nation of Islam. Is it this a religious movement or is it a group of religion?

W. Deen Mohammed: Yes. Essentially , it's a spiritual movement and I wouldn't say religious movement, spiritual movement, but yes a religious movement too, but more a spiritual movement. Simply because we were not aware of what Islam really was, and we were given terms such as Nation of Islam, Mecca, Quran and such language, such terminologies, Islamic terminologies, but really in design, we were more, I would say, Church-like, more Trinitarian in our religious ideas than we were Muslim.

Speaker 3: And what is the Muslims goal? What is that you wish to accomplish? Name two or one?

W. Deen Mohammed: Yes, yes. Well our needs were the same as the needs of most Africa-American, or blacks in this country, and where some sought to attend- address those needs through politics, we sought to address them as Muslims, because that was the avenue open to us, introduced, but I think that our aspirations are no different than the aspirations of most African-Americans in this country.

At one time the Honorable Elijah Muhammad was given media attention for his asking for certain states in this country. That interest lasted for about eight years at the most and it died as fast as it came about. It was a strategy and really takes a lot of time to explain. The make up of the Nation of Islam, and what really was operating, what really was taking place, or operating in the life of the Nation of Islam, to give it the kind of image it had, takes a lot of time to explain that, but the Nation of Islam was really what the honorable Elijah Muhammad made it. One man. He was thought of as a message of G-d, powerful divine power.

So whatever he said, did. That was what was accepted, and he himself, I think was a human being, just like all the rest of us, believing that G-d was (unclear) him, but a human being like all the rest of us, and he would progress the Nation of Islam, or lead the Nation of Islam, many times by experimentation, trial and error, and if anyone will study the history of Nation of Islam from 1930, that's the record he has. We started at 1930. From 1930 to the 1960's and 70's, you would see that real changes were taking place. I recall when we were not allowed to have radios. In fact, as a young man, a teenager young man, no radios. We were not have allowed to have radios, contact with--

Speaker 3: Because you were black?

W. Deen Mohammed: No, contact with the evil white man's world, was forbidden. So if you listened to radio, you could be influenced by it.

Speaker 3: So you didn't within the religion.

W. Deen Mohammed: Right, yes I. No radios, no radios. I couldn't read the books of the-- public books. We had our own textbooks from schools, for schools. We couldn't use the textbooks from the public American or western authors, and Honorable Elijah Mohammed in about 1947, he changed all that. He said, "Well, we will have to live here. After all, this world is not going to come to the end right now, so we have to live here. So let us do something to improve our situation while we are here." That became his new philosophy. So he came out with a new philosophy, at 1947. We got teachers in the school. Even some non-Muslims came into our school. We started using the textbooks from the public schools. Take same textbooks used by other schools, private schools and public schools.

Not that deep, he gave up this idea. No, the idea was still there, the same idea, but he begun the open community up and allowed them to have contact with the outside world. With that came also, the push for business world. He said, "Well, if he are going to live here, we should have something. We should have something material." He began to push for business growth too. If you give somebody an idea of the world that's strange, contrary to what the popular believe is, you can only keep them in that idea if you keep them isolated. Once you allow a curious mind to come in contact with the other [unintelligible 00:22:38] the real world, then you are going to lose some people.

So Honorable Elijah Mohammed was no fool, he knew that. I've tried to make this point with some of our hardcore people who still wants to hold onto the old way. I say, "Look, you think I'm going wrong? The Honorable Elijah Mohammed (unclear), if I'm going wrong". [laughter] Yes?

Speaker 4: Sometimes on the subways--

W. Deen Mohammed: Yes? I didn't get it.

Speaker 4: Sometimes on the subways, you see like Muslims giving out books to people and collecting money, is that a way of making yourselves recognized to the public? Is that a--

W. Deen Mohammed: Well, yes. We used to do that a lot in the past and I think it's still necessary, that we--

Speaker 4: Is that legal?

W. Deen Mohammed: Give the people a choice. I don't know what's legal or not, but if it's not legal, we shouldn't do it. If there's a law against it, we shouldn't do it. Muslims believe in respecting the laws of the lands. If there's a law against-- If the law is bad law, we believe in doing the same thing that most Americans believe, try to change it, but don't ignore the laws. That's how I believe. Now, if it's not legal, then they shouldn't be doing that, and I don't know if those are our people, because a lot of people call themselves Muslims.

Speaker 4: Yes.

W. Deen Mohammed: It could be another group, I don't know, but if it's members of our community, then I would speak for them. They shouldn't be doing that.

Speaker 4: That's okay. Thanks.

W. Deen Mohammed: Yes?

Speaker 6: I'm a freshman, I hope I remember. The gentleman's named correctly, but I think it was Wallace Fard Muhammad who announced about the Raphael widow, Jesse Jackson. This is been a new part of your organization or are you part of same organization? The second part of the question is, are you as political as, I say, the Flag Baptist Church? You know, like in the American Avenue. That's the most, after motivationist remark. Motivationist political as that of like [unintelligible 00:24:37] as pitch policy, while you serve at American politics.

W. Deen Mohammed: Yes, but first part of the question: no, we are not the same. Minister Louis Farrakhan, he chose to stay in the old ideas. Really I don't think he is in that old idea as much as he perhaps believe it is, but he chose to take that role, for various reasons, I suppose. We represent ideas that are poles apart. In fact, your Baptist idea of religion is closer to what we believe in to than what Farrakhan represents. We would identify religiously more with your Baptist believes that we would identify with those of Farrakhan.

Now, as for political involvement, or political position, of the community, I would say it is the same. It's the same, it shouldn't be any different.

I don't know exactly the political interests in the Baptist movement. I'm don't know, I'm not aware of just how the Baptist would view political involvement (unclear) black people. I can't recall hearing it addressed by the Baptist, but I would think that their position is no different than my position, of most organized, well meaning black people [unintelligible 00:26:28] I believe we are the same, we feel the same, our position should be the same. Yes?

Speaker 5: Good evening. This is the Nation Of Islam now? Or the American Muslim Mission or [unintelligible 00:26:46]? What is your official name of your organization?

W. Deen Mohammed: American Muslim Mission.

Speaker 5: Is the official name?

W. Deen Mohammed: Well, it's the name.

Speaker 5: What's the name of the--?

W. Deen Mohammed: Reckoning, it's the name we are know about, American Muslim Mission. Our official name is [Arabic language], The Islamic Propagation, but who'll understand that? So were [unintelligible 00:27:09] Americans to know that we are up in America, we are here to stay. We are not going anywhere, except in [laughs]. We are not going out.

Speaker 5: I've seen you in Harlem every year, in July. You celebrate the 4th of July, is that correct?

W. Deen Mohammed: We celebrate the 4th of July.

Speaker 5: It's some kind of march, activity that happens.

W. Deen Mohammed: Our Patriotism Day. Patriot Day, yes, yes.

Speaker 5: Is that what happens? What is it?

W. Deen Mohammed: Yes, many of us, we strongly believe that the absence of staying power and effectiveness in African-American drive to gain admission. He did mission into life of this country. The life of this country. It's due to him, still being an outsider in his spirit. He's an outsider. I've talked to many who have, long before, we decided that we wanted to help African-American, emphasis on politics and et cetera. I talked to many of then who've been doing it all their life. When they talked to me I said, "What? That's a surprise. So you are more separatist than we are".

They still talk outside of America. They talk about themselves like they are outside of America. "

well you know they aren't going to this thing or let us do this. You know, this is their country." That's the wrong attitude. I feel that the only way you can gain something in a situation is to identify with the concern in that situation and if you can identify with responsibility for that situation, you'll do even better. So we are trying to promote this patriotism, where the members of our community identify as owners of this country. As owners of this country, as shareholders in this country, as people responsible for the future of this country, just as any white man, anybody else.

And to do that, we need a sense of attachment to this country, so we have our own idea of patriotism. It doesn't mean waving the flag and telling everybody that has a different idea, "Go home, America is not for you." There are all kind of patriots.

Speaker 6: Do you see the Nation of Islam growing stronger in the 80's, as in the United States and maybe internationally?

W. Deen Mohammed: Actually, that's an old idea. We shouldn't even think of the Nation of Islam growing stronger anywhere, because in that sense we are no Nation of Islam. When Muslims speak of nation in that sense, they use the term [Arabic language], that means nation. When they say [Arabic language] it means religious nation, community. Is the worldwide community, just like the Christians community of the world. Only we are people who our community oriented more than I would say spiritually oriented. We are a community oriented. We are a community oriented people, so we think of ourselves as a world community, as ummah, is the word.

And when you translate into English, they translate it nation, they've done that, but since we have questioned the exactness of the translation, we say, "Hey, translation can confuse people." now I find many immigrant Muslim taking up our terminology. They're saying no they're not in their nature and they say community, that the world community or the Muslim community of the world. They're using the same language and I don't think that they were ignorant, they weren't ignorant. If they were ignorant it's because they don't know our language, they come over here and they don't know the American language, the western language that well to know how to see the small differences and meaning, you see.

They took up the nation, for the community but it shouldn't be nation because nation has strong political connotations.

Speaker 7: Back to where the young lady over there was saying that's about Muslim program. Do you think if you give us a more specific answer, goals of the Muslim?

W. Deen Mohammed: What are their goals?

Speaker 7: Yes, what is their expectation, do you think you'll give a more specific answer as of we all could understand what [unintelligible 00:32:27] people would give you all more respect or maybe a lot of people don't know what you're all about.

W. Deen Mohammed: I understand, to really tell you about the hopes, aspirations of Muslims you need too much time. What we would like to do, this is our strongest desire now, our strongest desire is to identify with the aspirations of the excellent American person because those are same aspirations we have. The only difference is we have Islamic influences, Islamic demands on our life but those difference is not so great that I think I should accent or highlight those differences in a meeting like this, in a discussion like this. There is nothing that a Muslim can lawfully see as a Muslim, as a Muslim that should be rejected by a decent American person.

I don't know anything; I don't know any aspiration that we can have that wouldn't be accepted by the average decent American person. To say we want material improvement in our life that's not saying any big thing, I think most of us want that. To say we want our own schools, I don't think that's a big thing because many of the Baptist, they insisted in having their own school, Methodists and many others they insisted on having their own school. I could list certain things certainly but what I said about the main focus for Muslim community is on community that takes care of the whole thing. That's where we're different.

Our focus is on community so we feel an obligation to our community and that I think give us, make us more cohesive maybe by people in terms of what is the make up of the general black community. Of course, I think the general black community if you go to [unintelligible 00:34:48] Baptist you'll find a cohesiveness there a unity and a tightness there maybe for the Baptist but all the blacks are not Baptist, there is many denominations and many of them are not even church, church based people. Our adherence to the Islamic faith and being that, that faith focuses upon community life, respecting our community life is what gives us perhaps a state character in America but no one should feel that that's a political community, it's a religious community, it's not a political community.

The prophet himself, peace be upon him, our holy book and the prophet himself led the Muslims, taught the Muslims how to live with other people, coexist. How to accept even to be the subject of other nations as long as that nation recognize your fine aspirations, your decent human aspirations and does not persecute you or your faith in G-d, then you should lend your support to that nation, this is all established in history. We're not advocating anything new; many times they present me in the magazine. I hear they say, “oh he is different Muslim, he's not like Khomeni," Yes I'm not Khomeni, I'm not made up like Imam Khomeni, but if they're trying to say that the Imam Warithu Deen Mohammed is bringing in a new concept, if he is altering or modifying the religion so it would be acceptable to American people and American way of life, then they're wrong. I insist upon true orthodox religion. I don't like the term orthodox but since it says it takes our mind back to what originally was. I insist up on that kind of religion, that kind of presentation of religion and I’m convinced that just as it was accepted by Christian ruler, over Ethiopia in the days of the prophet it can be accepted by any decent minded and Christian ruler and people today. Yes since I was answering his question I (unclear).

Speaker 8: There always other terms that they use for us on minority.

W. Deen Mohammed: What is that?

Speaker 8: the term minority.

W. Deen Mohammed: Minority?

Speaker 8: Yes, they see us as. Do you agree on that term?

W. Deen Mohammed: Minority? Yes I accept that the Muslims are a minority.

Speaker 9: Why.

Speaker 8: But like me, I'm a black man in America, I don't see myself as a minority.

W. Deen Mohammed: Well, that depends on the way you're seeing yourself, if you see yourself in terms of skin color you're minority but if you see yourself in some other sense then you might be a minority. I see myself as a minority, I see myself as a majority. Yes, when I look at myself as a black person, I see myself as a minority member in the citizenry of America but actually when you think about it we might not be a minority. Only if you look at black and white but if you look at national origin, we might be a majority because, the whites are French, Italian, all kind of people, Irish, all kind of people. So you're right, you convinced me I thought about it I'm convinced that you're right, he's not a minority. Yes?

Questioner: What I would like to ask you is the situation of the media is I think the black Christian and the Black Muslim at the same time using Jewish issue to make confusion. How would you see that we fit to make sure there will be less confusion with black Christian and the Jewish or say Jews and the Black Muslim at this time that you can see with media.

W. Deen Mohammed: Yes the only way I know to deal with that problem is to promote cooperation, friendship and cooperation between the major faiths. Our religion, Judaism and Christianity. I don't think we could do as much in trying to address the separate issues as we could by just insisting upon encouraging respect and cooperation between the faiths because after all we belong to one strand of revelation of prophesies. The prophets for the Jews and the prophets for the Christians are the prophets of Muslims and we find that as a strong (unclear) now the fact that (unclear), at least in 10 years maybe.

In Saudi Arabia, strong religious center of the Islamic world and Catholic, Catholicism, Protestantism, to bring the faiths together and there is good participation from the Jews in this effort, in the faith effort. I support that [unintelligible 00:40:41] the conflicts involved. Not that they're not important but I don’t think that I can do it much by addressing those as I can by addressing the unity of the three great religions.

Moderator: I think we have time for just one more question.

Questioner: I would like to ask when is your religion (unclear) empowerment and advancement of woman, politically, socially, in democracy, nationally and internationally.

W. Deen Mohammed: Well, I've talked to scholars in the religion. Religious people, higher up and more important than I am, in terms of what they are responsible for (unclear), et cetera. I'm convinced that most of the Muslims find (unclear) in the teachings of the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet [unintelligible 00:41:38]. They applaud the progress of the woman in the world today, but they frown upon what we call the exploitation of the woman. We think that the West leads are moving very well on one side of the liberation needs of woman, but it's hurting on another side that's precious, and that is, we think, that somebody should also toot the horn, blow the horn for femininity, for motherhood, for female qualities, because without these society is a dying tumble. All right, thank you. [applause]

[00:42:42] [END OF AUDIO]