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# Interview Changes in the Nation of Islam Pittsburg PA

### By Imam W. Deen Mohammed

[music]

**Host:** As salaamu alaykum. Ladies and gentlemen we would like to thank you for tuning in our program Islam in Focus. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Warner Cable and its staff for providing us with this opportunity. I would like to now introduce my two guests today the leader of the American Muslim Mission, Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed, as salaamu alaykum brother Imam.

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** Wa 'alaykum as-salaam.

**Host:** My co-host Imam Mustafa Hussain, as salaamu alaykum Imam.

**Imam Mustafa Hussain:** 'alaykum as-salaam.

**Host:** I thought about reading a long biographical sketch on the accomplishments and the acknowledgments of the Imam Muhammad they has been given but this list would take us the whole program. We would like to just say that Imam Muhammad is a G’d-inspired man who adheres to the teachings of the Holy Qur’aan and the life of Prophet Muhammad.

Imam Muhammad has been blessed by Almighty G’d Allah to be a teacher for mankind regardless to race, religion or ethnic background. Ladies and gentlemen this is indeed a pleasure and a privilege to have our leader Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed here today.

We are going to be discussing with Imam Muhammad on the first part of our interview, some of the changes that has taken place in---it used to be Nation of Islam---now it is the American Muslim Mission. I would first like to start off by asking the Imam, could you explain to us some of the dramatic changes that have occurred since you have assumed leadership in 1975---number one beginning with the acceptance of Caucasians in our community.

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** Historically the Muslims in America have been---I would say---dealing with problems, reacting and responding to situations just as the other African Americans have, the other Black people have in America. You will find that in the early days of our movement, we were very private and secretive group. After about 30 years the movement began to get involved in business.

The late leader Elijah Muhammad began to promote business growth in the community. Finally during the 1960s we got to be known as a protest mass movement, a protest movement along with the Civil Rights Movement.

One side was the Nation of Islam and Black Nationalism. On the other side was the Civil Rights Movement. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad was a very wise leader and who had---I think had great insight than his knowledge of the needs, especially the emotional needs and psychological needs of the people that he was leading. He brought us out of that kind of secretive society that we were in. A lot of the teachings that we had in those days were taken out of circulation.

So what I am doing is showing you that the changes that I introduced are just part of a history of changes. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad himself was constantly bringing about changes in the thinking of his followers. His last annual address, the one I am referring to now was a second furthest apart the next-to-last address it was in 1973.

The Honorable Elijah Muhammad introduced special guests of his. Now this was not the first time he had such guests. I remember the previous years the Honorable Elijah Muhammad almost always had some guests during the great day of the Convention who were non-Black. We say Arab or Pakistani, but we know the people of Pakistan their colors range from Black to White. Some of them are White folks and Turkish people, most of them are White folks. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad would have some of these people as his guests, but on this occasion he made a point of identifying this guess who was sitting on the rostrum---on the stand. To identify him---he had made a point of identifying him as a White man. He pointed to him and he said, "You see the brother here, he is a White man, he is a Muslim and one of the scientists among the Muslims."

We understand the word scientists; it is not one working for industry. He means a religious scientist. One who is very wise in the teachings of the religion that is what he meant. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad on that occasion also invited, or I would say advised, in fact he did advise his following to change with the changes, he said “If a White man can be good by you, if he can respect you, then you do the same by him.”

He said, "I am telling you this from the bottom of my heart." From my heart, he said. Never had he addressed us like that before especially on the White man, a situation or a race. Then comes his son two years later after his passing---only one day behind his passing in fact, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad passed one day before the annual address of the convention.

And we were really hoping, a week before that we were expecting, I was expecting that he would make it. Because my father he had such spirit he could bring himself around. About a week before the convention, I was in the hospital room with him. He showed such strength and looked like he had recovered almost. I said, "Daddy, I think you're going to be able to be with us, you're going to make the address”.

He said, "Yes, son maybe, If Allah want me to do that. But if I do not be there, you all will be there." That is what he said. When I came to be the leader, they introduced me, in fact, on that day as the leader of the community.

They asked for the approval of the staff people, the ministers, the leaders, the captains and the people around the country. And also the gathering there, they asked them to approve me as a leader. I got a thunderous applause indicating that they all accepted me as the leader. From that moment, I began to introduce change. The first change was this, "That what we have been given has been practical teachings and symbolic teachings.

We have been told to study the terminology in our religion. I was hint in a new direction, that we would be not taking these teachings for granted but we will be seeking to know the secret meanings in this symbolic language and we would be sharing that with the community.

The next thing I did was bring the community to conform to what is essential and fundamental basic in the Qur’aan and the holy book of the Muslims. Mind you, I did not bring the holy book. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad had always had the holy book with us, since 1932 or '33. Some say 1930 when he first began. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad had always shown us the Qur’aan, the holy book of the Muslims. He said, "This is a pure book. This is the perfect book.

I told the Muslims, I said, "You ever heard them say that 'Of those mystic documents, those mystical documents.' Did you ever hear him say any those were perfectly pure? No he did not but he said that of the Qur’aan. He told us, I used to hear him talk, I hope I am not talking too much?

**Host:** No sir, I want you to talk.

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** It is very important for us to see certain things about the Honorable Elijah Muhammad and how he, himself wisely brought about changes. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad used to say often, in fact as far back as 1950s I know, he used to say - and this would be on Sundays when he had the big gathering and a lot of new people, and a lot of Muslims were there, he would say, "Do not make the mistake of thinking that when you join here you are joining just this small group." He said, "When you join here, you become a member in the Muslim community of the world." He said, "Anywhere you go on this earth, where there is a Muslim community, a Muslim country, you will find that they will accept you as Muslim. You will be a Muslim with brothers numbering them into the millions." This could have been his psychology, too, to make people comfortable with his community, with the small community in those days, in the 1950s, early 50s, to make them have a sense of dignity, and power, and numbers.

That could have been, but I think whether it was his intention or not, if it was not his intention, it was G’d's will that he did that because the big problem for us was coming into the main life, in the main thinking---the real thinking, social thinking of the Qur’aan - the life and thinking of the Qur’aan, that was a big problem for us. Then it was easy for me to show them that the Honorable Elijah Muhammad has taught you to respect this Qur’aan. It is the highest authority in the teachings of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad.

Now, let us see what this Qur’aan asks of us. It asks of us that we believe in one Allah and one Allah only, and that He is the Allah for all people, whether they be Muslim, Christian, Jews, Atheists---no matter what they are. There's only one Allah for everybody. We have to accept that Muhammad, to whom the Qur’aan was revealed, is the prophet, peace be upon him, of the Holy Qur’aan.

Then I said, we have to look at the language of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, and see what he meant when he said he was the Messenger of Allah. We have to understand that and know the difference.

I said also, we have to believe in the essential teachings of the Qur’aan regarding hereafter and everything because we did not. The package we were given was really a package to bring about social reform, it was to appeal to militants. It was designed to appeal to militants. It had a whole lot of psychology and a whole lot of charge words and language in it to embolden the Black man, and to give him a sense of special identity, a special place in the universe, you see?

**Host:** Yes, sir.

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** I explained all that to them. I said another thing we have to do, we have to accept that the teachings---the mystical teachings and the origin of the White man. It is not really the teachings of the origin of the flesh of the White man, but it is the teachings of the origin of the racist mind of the White man. I said we have to understand that now and accept White people. I said, do not you remember our leader telling us that the mother of our savior was a White woman and he never called her a devil.

So we opened the doors to all people. That was a change---that was a big change. Perhaps that was the most difficult one for us because we had been taught to unite the Black people and separate from White folks.

**Host:** Do you think that change was so difficult because of the situation that we have been through in America, the kind of coming from slavery, and coming from Jim Crowism, as you said, when we came into the community, many of us, we hated White folks. [chuckles]

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** That is true. I know that is what accounted for. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad, if anything, he softened---what you call diluted, he weakened that agitation. Many people say, "We follow our leader, Elijah Muhammad. He talked about White folks called them dummies." We found out that the Honorable Elijah Muhammad was a doctor, we did not know it.

Black people who have had all these things inside of them and never expressed them the hatred for Whites, and questions. Why are we treated like that? They would hear the Honorable Elijah Muhammad talked about the White man and analyze the whole history and the whole situation of the treatment of Blacks in this country. They were receiving therapeutic treatment. Most of his followers, you could not excite them to break laws, you could not excite them to march on the White House, or to make militant demands. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad was the speaker. He was a minister and a speaker. His ministers, he authorized them to speak, but his followers, they would wait for a signal from the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, and they would do no more than what he signaled them to do; which tells us that he had a complete control over those who follow him. To have that kind of control, he must have been a very, very good doctor.

**Host:** Yes, sir, sure, from what you are saying, the things that had been inside, that was boiling inside of us, he brought it to the surface and was able to control us.

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** That is exactly what I am saying. What I am saying is that we were intimidated. A lot of us carried that bitterness in us but we would not express it. We would not say it. These people who were so vocal out here, like the Black leaders of the 1960s, SNCC [Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee]. Those people Stokely Carmichael, those people in my opinion, were not the most hurt- seriously hurt of the Black people.

The most seriously hurt of the Black people were those who kept it inside. The burden was too heavy for them to even think that someone else would understand it. It was those people that the Honorable Elijah Muhammad gave the courage to express themselves, to let it out, He gave them room, an opportunity, an experimental situation where they could just get out and say, "Yes, he's a devil," and get all of that out of their system.

It was those people that were emboldened to be honest, to be honest with themselves to be honest with the White man, and to really take that responsibility of trying to do something to change their whole situation, rather than putting all the burden on the White men and the federal government.

**Host:** Imam, the other changes that have taken place in the community, the dropping of the former FOI, the military stance that the nation once was taking. You removed that?

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** Yes. It was no longer necessary. As I said, we have had to deal with situations. You mentioned slavery that was a situation, Jim Crow days was a situation; the condition of inequality and denial of opportunity that was another situation. Believe me the Civil Rights Movement was no different from our beloved Prophet Muhammad's membership, the Nation of Islam in that respect.

The Honorable Elijah Muhammad, too, was assessing the needs of the people to have equal opportunity, to be equally respected in this country, and he went about it in a different way. But he was sensing the same things, same needs that the Civil Rights Movement was sensing. What he did was called for, in light of the conditions and circumstances and the situation that was there, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, as you know, after the trouble of 1960s, the legislation brought about a lot of changes and opened a lot of opportunities.

With the opening of opportunities, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad had to accept that reality. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad was not out there asking for separate states.

**Host:** Why not?

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** We had to change with the situation. And that is exactly what I've had to do.

**Host:** The changes that you have made --

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** No need for that. That militant group, or militant force or body within the membership of the Nation of Islam was there because we needed it as emotional support, we needed it as psychological support because you know we did not have equal citizenship in this country.

**Host:** That is true.

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** We did not have equal citizenship in this country and we were segregated, secluded, rejected, and scorned. The psychology of the Nation of Islam was, 'since you can't have this acceptance in the American society, then let us create a structure, a structure that will feed these needs in the make-up for the Black man.' So a structure resembling a nation was formed, and a nation needs its military.

And the military does what? The main thing---we see a lot of these youngsters who do not have jobs, who look idle and are looking for something to get into---many times the country will say, “what can the military do?" And they will enlist---they will start asking for youngsters. It might be peacetime too, but they will start advertising that there is opportunity for youngsters in the service. It is good for them, it will give them a sense of belonging to something that is strong and something that is responsible for them; something that will demand of them correct behavior.

A lot of the Blacks they are starving now for discipline and direction in their lives and though we do not have that military organ---it has been dismantled---I am still encouraging a sense of community, a sense of government and some militancy especially in the life of the individual, we have to discipline ourselves. I saw it as something that was necessary, the old concept of nationhood, and I felt that it would be a problem if we carry it now into the new teaching or into the new day, it would be a problem, it would present a problem. Because what it would do, is keep the people in their old mind and we did not want them in that old mind but we still want the discipline.

**Host:** Yes sir.

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** Yes.

**Host:** Okay. The changing of the-- I know when I came into the community in 1975, and it was the Nation of Islam, and then the name was changed to the World Community of Islam in the West and now to the American Muslim Mission. Could you explain to us the transitional changes of the names with that?

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** Yes, what moved me and motivated me to make that change, I think, was not so much the Muslim community as the community of Black people in America. From my conversations with other Black leaders, political leaders, church leaders, business people, I find that our group is no different than they are when it comes to the inability to feel at ease as an American and as a supportive American, All right? And believe me, most of our African-American people they have a problem, really, as identifying as an American, especially as a supportive American.

So I said, before we can progress we have to accept that we are Americans, how can you progress in a country if you can't identify with it? It is impossible. You have got so much going against your spirit. I find that you can hardly do anything unless you have the spirit, right?

**Host:** That is right.

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** You would be in the bed and you will say, “I want to get up, I want to go out and make a big buck today”; but if you do not have the spirit to go out and make that big buck you will not make the first step. The first step is to have the spirit to get up and make that big buck. What I find that in America in order to progress, the first thing you need to do is have the spirit to progress in America, and the spirit to progress in America depend on you believing that there are possibilities for you in America. If you think that this is a White man's country and not a Black man's country that kills the spirit.

So we brought about changes to the Nation of Islam that is satisfying that desire to go back, to withdraw. I said, no we have to go on, this is no more the Nation of Islam this is the World Community of Islam. And the “world community” that is the world---that is the whole world you see, the World Community of Islam. Once I saw that the spirit of the people had accepted that, they had identified with the world of humanity, then I said now we have to come back home; American Muslim Mission.

And I explained to my community when we say mission, we do not mean a missionary movement that works hand in hand with [laughs] you see. What we mean is a propagating movement and the word “mission” is chose not to identify exactly what we are in that sense, because Da’wah is propagation; da’wah is a Muslim term for propagation, that is why the word mission is chosen, to make us aware of the fact that we as a people who were deprived and subjected, that once we say we know a better way, once we say we know direction, we have direction for ourselves, then that direction should be good for anybody in our situation. Whether they are Black, Hispanic or anybody else.

Once we say we have direction then we should have a mission in America, so American mission. Our American mission is to dignify ourselves, and I think in dignifying ourselves we offer something to all other Americans who are in similar situations.

**Host:** Yes dignifying ourselves as a people, especially under the condition that we have came from, I would like to know America itself, if it looks at us, and like you said the way our spirit was broken up and how G’d has blessed us because it is a blessing to have leadership and to have leadership as yourself.

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** Direction is even more important than leadership.

**Host:** To have that direction, then America can see itself and turn-- and make a turn if it accepts that direction.

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** Yes. I've always felt, I do not know if this is the concern that you're coming from right now, but I have always felt since a young man, I have always felt that racism, the serious problem of racism for Blacks in this country would not go away until we found a way to get rid of it. In other words, the White man cannot pass laws to make racism disappear, the White man cannot talk to his people and make racism disappear.

I felt that the racism that we have suffered is due in great part to the image of us in the eyes of White people, and many White people they have been deceived, they think that the history of our people in Africa is a history of savages. You see they, the majority of White people have been mis-educated and they look at our performance since being brought here to America and they see slaves---the majority of them tolerating the conditions of slavery, they see many of them are very passive people, “Uncle Tomish” like Uncle Remus, that you hear of in the story, and that is the image they get. Then they see us accepting everything they give us. And not having much individual taste, you see.

So they say, “these people are coons," and what they mean when they say 'coons,' they mean you are people that have nothing, you do not have any fix for your life. A coon removed from his home, if he found more crumbs on the other side of town, he will move from his home. He will move his home, his babies, everything, he will just take them up and go where he finds a few more crumbs. I think White people have images like that of us. Although there are strong people like Fredrick Douglas and many others, they are the strong but they see those people as miraculous exceptions [laughs].

They do not think that is our nature; they think that was just an accident that that one came out different. I believe that it is up to us, that we are the only people that can get rid of the bad situation of racism in the country.

The Klan, people who have that Klan mentality---I believe the members of the Klan---I believe a lot of them are intelligent, wise people and I think they are playing games. They are working game, but a lot of their followers are just ignorant, just like the followers of most leaders you will see that are demagogues---people that play on the sentiments of their subjects, of their following you see?

So I feel that what we have to do is study our own problems, study on our own situation, we have got brains, we have got good brains. Study our own situation and then treat our own ills, treat our own ills and prove to the White man that we are as capable of leading ourselves, as capable of being responsible for our families, and the shape of our family life and the shape of our spirit as he is for his own. We do not have to wait for indication from them, the government, from the system. We can ourselves look into our life and study our situation and study the future. And we can chart our own course at least spiritually, culturally, we can do that.

**Host:** Yes sir, that is very beautiful. Well Imam, the special role that the Honorable Elijah Muhammad and Fard Muhammad, I know that I am listening to you on different times that you said that we should view them as social reformers.

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** Yes, sir. That is exactly what they were. We know for a fact that the foreigner who brought the Honorable Elijah Muhammad his package, he really used religion because he felt that the poor, culturally deprived Black people who needed the kind of medicine that he had. He felt that those people were contained in spirit and religion, contained in religion, that the church is what held them.

If not the church, many of them did not attend church. They were people who had given up on church, and they were just gone carefree working and just day by day, living for wages, etc. He felt that those people were the children of the church, the children of faith and the children of the church, and that they were not political-minded, they were not sophisticated enough for a pure Islamic approach to them or appeal.

What he had to do is come in the guise of Christianity and give it another name until he could win them over to a program of social reform. If you notice, the concept of G’d in the Muslim religion in the “Black Muslim”--- I hate to use this terminology but just for sake of clarity of the audience because we were known by that term---the concept of G’d in Black Muslim theology was really nothing but the concept of G’d in Christian theology with slight modification maybe.

There is the belief in Christian theology that the Son descended from the Father. We were told that Fard, the G’d of the Black Muslim theology, descended from G’d, his father, from G’d his father. We are told that Christ was born to save who--- sinners? That he had come as a savior to the sinners, to redeem. That was a term the ministers used to use very often back there, that “he came to redeem us”. He was wise enough to see that if he introduced his package in the wrappings of what they had already been used to and accepted, then it would not be difficult for them. It was very easy for them, especially when he reversed the psychology and said, "G’d is Black. The White man is the devil."

**Host:** [laughs] Yes, sir.

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** [chuckles]

**Host:** That is very important because I think that looking at society today with what Fard Muhammad used, as you said, it is the same thing that is put out when we see the concept of the Caucasian image of G’d.

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** Yes, certainly. Certainly, it is no different. What's the difference? One fellow he said, “Brother Imam”, he said, "I know that you have made all these changes and I know that you condemn Farrakhan." He said, "Brother Imam, do you not think that some of them are sincere?" I said, "Look, I used to be one of them when I was sincere."

[Laughter]

**Host:** Yes, sir.

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** [laughs]

**Host:** Yes, sir. Could you explain the significance of the names that we have taken on? We used to have Xs, now my name is Robert Islam. The Imam's name is Mustafa Hussain.

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** Yes. This was a tradition that actually started with the old leadership. In his time, it was done to fulfill the needs of identity for us. Many Blacks are very uncomfortable with themselves and they still have what we call self-identity problems, identity crisis, identity problems.

The Nation of Islam made its followers, its adherents very comfortable with their identity because it connected them back with Africa, it connected them back with Islam, and it proved that we have an Islamic past as well as an African past so that made it very easy for the people to accept the new identity as their own.

The Honorable Elijah Muhammad even made Muslim synonymous with self. He said, "What is your own self?" He said "your own self" a kind of catechism he gave. He said, "What is your own self?" and the answer, "Your own self is a righteous Muslim." so for us, Muslim was not an Arab. It shouldn't be for anybody because Muslims are all over the world. They have all nations. Another thing he said, "You will get a Muslim name one day," he said, "but I was not given the authority to give you a Muslim name so I give you an X."

And I said, "Why an X?" I always thought about that. I always wanted to know why. I think I was conditioned like that by my father and my mother. They always told me saying, "Well, our Savior said that you are going to be like your father and that you would follow his footsteps." so I think he made me take up his burden. I said, "Why the X?" I said, "Why this X?" then I said, "X means unknown I know that. I know." I have heard that X means unknown and we did not know our ancestors' names, our ancestral family name.

We did not know that. But I said, "Why this X?" and finally it came to me as I have found in history that the slave masters---the slaves could not write English some of them perhaps were good when they first came over, they are probably good writers in some African dialect or Arabic because many of them were Muslims who knew Arabic language and their language were Arabic like the people of Sudan and other places. I said, "Here is where it is at. The master said, 'Put your X,' he said, 'write your name, or put your X.'" [laughs] That is how the X got started, you see?

**Host:** Yes.

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** The slave would put his X. That means you do not have a name and that is what it meant. The Honorable Muhammad was saying, "You do not have a last name." It is practiced all around the world where the Muslims embrace the religion of Al Islam or Islam as it is commonly called that there they take on a Muslim name. You do not have to. If you have a good name, a name with good meaning that you are comfortable with, you do not have to change your name. You will meet many Muslims who will give Western names or get African names and they are Muslims. You won't get any Muslim name from them. It is just a good name. Well, those names if they are good names, in my opinion they are Muslim names though they are not by description Muslim names but they are Muslims because after all, why do you take on a Muslim name? It is because you want a name that has a good meaning? You want a name that complements your good nature, the excellence of your being?

We change the names in the tradition of the old history and old life, the Nation of Islam. The Nation of Islam was about dignifying and giving the people natural relationship with themselves and with their whole life. And I think that is what we have tried to do so my advice is that if a person is comfortable with a name though it not a typical Arab or Muslim name, they should keep that name because after all we are concerned about the family relationships.

Many times when you take on a new name, it hurt the family members, mothers, fathers, aunts, people, family members that have no problem with you joining a different religion as many of them do not. They are hurt because now the name, he is separated the name since it suggests that "he separates from our family." So I do not encourage people just take on names like that without thinking. They should discuss it with family members that are not Muslims. Say, "I am a Muslim now and I would like to take on a Muslim name" and discuss it with them. If you see it is going to hurt your family and you have a name that is not really misrepresenting you, I would not want to be called John Dog, D-O-G. I would tell my family, "Hey look, I am sorry. If you all do not understand why I want to change this name, then I am sorry [laughs]." That would be it. I am going to take on another name and that'll be it.

The best names are the names of G’d. I find that many Christian names come from the names of G’d, but you have to study the meaning and trace the history of that name.

You find that it comes from a name that is attributed to G’d, you see, of G’d. My name, as you know, was Wallace D. Mohammed and I took the name Warith ud Deen Mohammed, and head of the faith of Mohammed. I took it from the Qur’aan because in the Qur’aan G’d says that he caused the book to be inherited by people. He also says that, in the chapter, I think the title of the chapter is “The Believers” He calls the believers the “*warithun”*, this is plural of my name.

He called them the inheritors, so I took the name because of that meaning. It was so close to my name, Warith. Warith, it is close to Wallace. If you hear Pakistani or Indian say Warith, he will sound like he is saying Wallace. They say “Waris” instead of Warith. The pure Arabic pronunciation is Warith, but the Pakistanis will say Waris, and it sounds very much like my name. I will also let you in on another little secret, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad never called me Wallace, he called me “Waalice”. Waalice, he said, "Waalice". He said, "Waalice".

I said, "Why are you calling me “Waalice?" It did not sound right. It sounds like he was trying to say it like somebody else had said it because to the average American is Wallace, not Waalice.

**Interviewer:** We had went to a program that was about six years ago and before you had even told us that you had taken the name Warith, I think he had went to Canada. We met a brother there, he was a Pakistani imam. He said, "Are you a member of the World Community of Al Islam in the West?" I say, "Yes." He said, "Is Warith Deen your leader?" I said, "No sir." I said, "Wallace?". He said, "No, we do not call him Wallace, [laughs] we call him Warith ud Deen." When I heard, I was kind of hesitant…

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** That is true. There were Muslims from the Immigrant Muslim Community who had started to call me Warith before I announced it. That is right.

**Interviewer:** It stuck with me. I would like to probably once again look at the contributions that the Honorable Elijah Muhammad made to the African-American people. Maybe if you could just elaborate a little bit more because the name….

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** The main contribution he made, in my opinion, was to build on that work that had already been done to get African-American people to trust themselves more and to feel comfortable with themselves, and to trust themselves, and to depend on their own resources more, you see. We have great resources as a people. And men like Booker T. Washington and many others. Even Noble Drew Ali who is known as a mystic almost, who introduced the Moorish American teachings that they identify as Islam. Even that man, he was doing a job too, I think, of building trust in the black community, and confidence in self, and faith in black leadership.

We needed that after slavery. We still need it, you see. We have accomplished a lot, but we still need that. I think the greatest contribution Honorable Elijah Muhammad made was to wisely select from the teachings of Marcus Garvey, Drew Ali, and Booker T. Washington. And then complement the mystical teachings of Fard with that kind of support, by giving it that kind of support. What he accomplished was the credit that he is given by police departments, by intelligence departments in this country, and by many, many very successful business people in the community of the black, and the communities of the big cities.

They say that one thing he did- in fact, Edwin Berry used to be the head of the Urban League. He used to be the national head of the Urban League. He said, "Sir, well, we can talk." He said, "What do you want to say to that man in the street that the Honorable Elijah Muhammad has brought up out of the gutter and now he wears a suit and tie, a white shirt and tie, he walks with dignity, he doesn't drink anymore, he doesn't smoke anymore, he is making an honest living? What are you going to say to that man?" You see, so that is his contribution.

Dignifying the people and giving them faith in themselves and giving them enough faith and enough faith in themselves and knowledge of themselves to feel comfortable with black leadership.

**Interviewer:** Yes sir. When I came into the community, I came in with that spirit because I had been a drug addict myself for about 12 or 11 years.

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** I was too, but my drug was black superiority.

[Laughter]

**Interviewer:** Just as heavy. When I heard the teachings of Islam, they gave me that sense of self. That sense of hope.

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** Yes, and believe me, I have seen things that we just cannot push it aside. Many Muslims think that- a lot of the imams say, "Now you are a Muslim with the Muslims of the world. Leave this problem of the past and just talk to the people about the universal principles and tenets of the faith, you see", but I tell them, "No, we can't do that because there is so much knowledge and so much experience in our past that is very valuable to us as a people and to any people in our situation."

**Interviewer:** Yes sir. I think that that is probably the one of the most important things that I think that you always stress is that we preserve our history. That we write it, we record it, and we preserve it. This is something I think that many of us feel that we do not have a history or we do not see the real value of our history on how we can take from our history some of the great achievements that our past leaders have given us, and our own individual family members have shown great strength by growing up under the situations, conditions that we have experienced in America. I do not want to exclude our Imam Hassain. I know that he probably has a few things that he'd like to ask you or say [chuckles].

**Hussain:** No, you are doing good.

**Interviewer:** Okay [laughs].

**Hussain:** I am all ears.

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** Imam Hussain has been around for a long time. He is one of the leaders of the old experience, and the new that I have great respect for. He'll always been a person who have had the wisdom to see needs in individual of the Nation of Islam, the Muslims and find a way to help them. Many people make the wrong approach. I see him in much the same way that I see my former teacher in elementary and high school, James Shabazz whose name now is Abdulaziz Shaikh Shabazz**---w**ho for 30 years almost was head of the school there, you see.

Those persons have had the wisdom to see the needs in the youngsters and to help groom, do that, make their contribution toward grooming us for what we have to do now. And Imam Hussain has been a great help with all of us.

**Interviewer:** Yes sir, and we are very proud and very thankful to Allah that we have Imam Hussain, we are. Is the pioneer community---we have a large pioneer community that I know that has reports, you read in papers, in magazines, they say that there has been a falling away and this and that, but we have a large pioneer community.

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** Very large pioneer community. In fact, I would say 50% or better of our active members and supporters, are the pioneers. They are the ones who are constant; they are the most constant members in our community, the pioneers. I would like to see, for my own enjoyment, I would like to see a challenge, a test. Those people who think that they have taken off and have separated from us and have taken off from the membership or taken members from us, the pioneers from us, I'd like to see a test. Produce your people have them to produce their people.

Then I will give a call for the pioneers to come at any one location and we will find money---if they do not the money to pay for their way because a lot of them are elderly people and they do not have the money to do it, but we will find money to get them in one location. When we get the people out, you will see the historical membership of the Muslims in this country going back way many years before I was even thought of as being a leader.

**Interviewer:** That is beautiful. We would like to probably-- Sorry, the last question before we close out, we would like to see the changes that have occurred in our community. We seem to have gained a greater acceptance in America and I guess in the Islamic world. Those changes that you made though, actually, they were more… were they more dictated to you by the Holy Qur’aan?

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** Yes, it is that exactly. They are dictated by the Qur’aan. I think own life and experiences dictates them too, but before I can approve any move, I have to make sure that is in accord with the teachings of the Qur’aan and with the life of Prophet Muhammad, peace be on me, you see. Now, I think what happened was that we were just in a favorable situation in terms of our opportunity to move up into positions or to grow in the life of the American people. Now, it may sound strange to you, but in the days of Honorable Elijah Muhammad, he had people working in prison administration.

In the days of Honorable Elijah Muhammad, he publicly gave us support with his mouth to Adam Clayton Powell, the late congressman of New York City who was very powerful and was very popular there. He said that if we ever have a candidate that we think we could support, we will support him. He asked some of the members of the Fruit of Islam, the militant arm in Chicago to go out and assist a black candidate in Chicago in his day and time. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad was talking in separate states and this and that. He was also, at the same time, recognizing the realities and that is that blacks are one and they have to work together, and we have real needs in America as American citizens. We have to recognize that, you see. What we did was just encourage our people. Now, our religion has done away with all the small ideas and raw emotions and bandage remedies. Now let us identify in the American country and get a big share of it. We do not want a half share, we want a full share in America, so we encourage people to vote and to become more politically aware and to raise their level of economic conscious, and just take full advantage of all the opportunities that are here for American people.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that frightens the black leadership now that we…?

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** It certainly does. It frightens them so much so that whenever they invite me, I wonder if it is to stick me in a pocket or in a corner, and then say I was there so they make sure it looks good.

[Laughter]

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** It certainly frightens them because they have had that exposure and that role all to themselves, and now, here, a big sizable community of very dedicated, disciplined people are now coming in and they have to share that with them, so I am sure they are very uncomfortable with this new situation---many of them, but this is unfounded. If they look into their hearts, they will see that they should be rejoicing and we should be joining each other hand and hand.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that in the near future it will come into that kind of understanding.

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** Certainly. Many of our great black leaders in the Christian world, society here in America and others, they have shown me from their treatment of us that they do not have that problem, but too many blacks have that problem. So I think the day will come very soon when more Muslims will be working together with the Christian African-Americans to advance the good life of the blacks and all American people.

**Interviewer:** Yes sir. Ladies and gentlemen, we have the opportunity in this first part of our program to have an interview with Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed who is the leader of the American Muslim Mission. I am quite sure that if you have listened, that you have benefited greatly. I know myself I have benefited greatly. We have had our resident imam, Imam Mustafa Hussain with us. Our Imam today is very quiet. This is a privilege for me, I tell you, and I feel very honored to have our leader imam with us today. I thank you very much for taking the time because I know you have a very busy schedule to come and spend time with us.

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** This is the way to spend it.

**Interviewer:** Yes sir, I am pleased. Thank you very much. We want to close our first part of our interview with Imam Mohammed. And as I opened with peace, I give you the greeting in Qur’aan and Arabic language of *as salaamu alaykum.*

**Imam Warith ud Deen Mohammed:** *Wa alaykum as salaam.*