

THE BLACK MUSLIMS
A Phenomenon of Negro Reaction

By Andrew Goodman
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In the summer of 1959 a mounting chill engulfed the atmosphere in the United States. America had become increasingly used to the cool breath of the cold war and thus she was to some extent numb to its new problems. This was a different chill, however. It had been pressing the soul of America for 400 years, but never had it been expressed in the form of such uncompromising hostility. Never before was the problem allowed to emerge from its ebony shell. What had happened? Jim Crow was finally reaping his bitter fruits. His cruel face was rising from the Negro ghettos, North and South, and his body presented itself in all its nakedness to the American public. But this was not all. A new attitude was being created in a large number of Negroes and an old attitude among the lower class had been given an important expression. The new attitude consisted of a brave insistence on freedom; the old one was Black Nationalism in the new form of the "Black Muslims".

Kenneth B. Keating rose to the occasion in August of that year when he made a startling declaration:

"A very disturbing development has been the emergence of a new hate group in the United States, which call itself Moslem and whose leader preaches a cult of racism for Negroes and extreme anti-Semitism.

"It obviously serves Communist interests to promote dissention among the Negroes in this country and to incite hatred against the Americans of the Jewish faith.

"The name adopted by this fanatical organization is an insult to the members of the Moslem religious faith, which has absolutely no relationship to this group.

" These developments require the attention of Congress. We must always be on the alert to efforts by subversives in our midst masking under one false front or another to strike at the core of our democratic principles and freedoms. " ↓

Senator Keating was at best naive and at worst diseased, equally as diseased as the Black Muslims. His disease, however, is less forgivable. I shall put off, for the moment, a refutation of Mr. Keating; debate with ignorance has no common ground on which to stand, and is therefore meaningless. Instead I shall create such a ground through investigation and knowledge.

Let us fly, for the moment, from the marble halls of the United States Senate to a somewhat less comfortable structure and take a look at the Muslim world view. For lack of a better name I shall call the place the New York Central Zoo. This is a totally fictional zoo and any relation to actual fact is purely symbolic. As we enter the grounds we find a great many somber looking houses all crowded together. Since it is a very pleasant summer day, there are many people at the zoo. Two things strike us at the first glance. First we see hundreds of big shiny cars which the public uses to transport themselves from their homes to the zoo; long black Cadillacs, shiny blue Dodge convertibles and many other makes, all lined up in the parking lot. The second thing we notice is that while there is a pleasant melange of men, women and children, there are no dark people. Everyone has a white skin! While this seems odd at first, after we spend some time at the zoo we soon learn that this is as it should be.

After wandering around in the sun for a while and talking to the

friends we meet at the zoo, we decide to go in and have a look at the show. As we approach one of the houses, we notice that it is uncommonly dirty and rather smelly. After a slight wince, however, we summon up our courage and walk in. Just before we get inside, however, a door man gives us a bag of peanuts. "You're not to eat them", he says, "they're for the sub-humans, they're not good enough for us". We laugh and say we only want to look, we don't want to feed the animals. "Suit yourself", he says, and we pass on.

● On the inside we finally see the dark people. But horror of horrors! They are behind bars! They are the animals! How can this be? Who put them there? Suddenly we feel as if our insides were being torn from our body. With terror written on our faces and with weakening limbs we witness the scene in the zoo.

The crowd is exultant. Everyone is enjoying the show. Women and children are laughing and giggling as they throw their peanuts and watch the antics of the dark people. Behind the bars are the dark people. The sign above the cage reads, "THESE ARE NEGROES. THEY WERE BORN IN AMERICA". A group of about thirty of them are crowded into the first cage. They are all wearing bathing suits, with the exception of one who occupies the only chair in the cage. He is dressed in a leopard skin and a white collar. On the outside of each cage there is a guard who is also a Negro. This person, however, is dressed in a business suit and stands constantly at attention. The other Negroes, on the other hand, are wretched. They are somberly walking around the cage. Once in a while they shout, but most of the time they just stare out at the crowd, like a puppy dog begging for a favor.

One little boy tugs at his mother's arm. "Mommy, Mommy", he shouts, "that one looks like you".

His mother, who is about to throw a peanut, lowers her arm to her side as a frown takes possession of her face. "Hush, Jonny, none of them are like me. They're black. They're all different. Now you be a good boy and throw your peanut".

"O. K. Mom. Watch this, I'll throw two of them". He reaches into his bag and takes two peanuts out and throws them into the cage. As they land, two Negroes leap for them. Both of them claim the peanuts and neither gives way. A fight ensues. It is an awful sight, but it is just what the crowd is waiting for. The battle wages on for five minutes or so until the contestants are completely covered with blood and overtaken by fatigue. When it is over, the two Negroes lie on the floor, unable to move.

At that point the man dressed in the leopard skin rises and picks up the peanuts. "Don't fight", he says, "we are all brothers. Only animals fight and we must show Mr. God that we are not animals. Now I'm going to give these two peanuts to Mr. God so that he won't get mad". As he says this he stuffs one of the peanuts in his pocket and holds the other in his hand. "Oh, Mr. God", he shouts, "come here Mr. God. Let's sing, brothers, let's sing a gospel song for Mr. God". As soon as he says that, all the Negroes start singing about such things as Paul, the Jordan River, and some Chariot or other.

"They sing well, don't they, Mom", says Jonny.

"Yes", says the mother, "that's one thing they know how to do".

Just as they are finishing their song the owner of the zoo,

Mr. God, walks in. Mr. God is a short, stubby white man who is almost as fat as he is tall. "I heard you calling, Mr. Minister. What do you want?"

"I have a peanut for you Mr. God. How are you fixed for peanuts?"

Mr. God stuffs his hand into his pocket and then pulls it out again. "I think I just could use a peanut or so, Mr. Minister. Hand it over". He takes the peanut and eats it. "By the way", he says, "I see you got an up and comer". He points to a Negro in the cage who is industriously constructing a house out of peanut shells. "I think we'll make him a guard soon".

"Oh thank you Mister God. Thank you! Thank you!", exclaims Mr. Minister as he kisses Mr. God's extended foot. "Thank you Mister God! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!"

As Mr. Minister finishes his obeisance, we finish our fantasy. Obviously this view of the race relations is somewhat distorted. It emerges, however, from a harsh but true reality. It comes from a continuous debasement of a certain part of the human race. In fact, it is a contortion that only a debased human could come up with. The fact remains, however, that while it is somewhat of a fantasy to believe that all white men are devils, it is true that the white man (and by this I mean Christian civilization in general) has proved himself to be the most depraved devil imaginable in his attitudes towards the Negro race.

This takes us back to the first fantasy of Mr. Kenneth Keating. His statement is symptomatic of the disease that has plagued the United States since the first landing of the slave ships. The Black Muslims, to

follow the metaphor of disease a step further, is the rise in temperature that follows upon the sickness. That is to say, it is both a warning signal and an attempt on the part of the body to heal the wound of the disease.

Keating's remarks are symbolic of America's attempt to close its eyes to the Negro problem in America. That isn't to say that we can easily manage such blindness, but the fact is that we have always tried to do it. It was much easier for the early slave traders to justify their exploitation because they did not have the available science to refute their belief in the innate inferiority of the Negro. If they had an ounce of guilt left, they comforted themselves with what they observed to be evidence of the inferiority of the Negro; the slave traders noticed that the Negroes were "savages". Since they had no previous contact with their slaves-to-be, they knew nothing about them. Not being trained anthropologists, they believed that they were "amoral" and had no social order.

Thus by defining the Negro, as the American Constitution once did, as three-fifths of a man, the white slave owners allowed themselves to overlook the fact that he treated his dog better than his human "brother". It is not strange, therefore, that the Muslims, who are constantly and intensely reminded of the white slave owning attitude toward the Negro, should reject the Christian notion of "brotherhood". The Muslims' distrust of what they might term "so-called Christian brotherhood" is therefore completely justified. Their further rejection of the white man's² definition of the black man is equally justified. Therefore, while the absolute condemnation of the white as a race is a false conclusion, no one can doubt the facts on which such a condemnation is made.

The concept of Christian brotherhood brings us to a very important point. The Muslims view Christianity as a symbol of white oppression and a false prop for the "so-called"³ Negro. While this total condemnation is perhaps slightly severe and falsely all-inclusive, the Muslims, in fact, have a very good case. It is very interesting to note in this connection the attitude of many churchmen in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Many missionaries in Africa and the New World were truly guided by honest convictions, even if the flag that brought them into contact with the Negroes was motivated by somewhat less lofty principles. While the churchmen were honest, their function was "an absolutely indispensable justification for the planting of the flag."⁴ Further, Christianity was more concerned with "the soul than it is about the body, to which fact the flesh (and the corpses) of countless infidels bears witness".⁵

Of the Church's general apathy toward the "body", I will speak later. Their most destructive attitude, however, was their religious indulgence in a monopoly on the truth. Thus, coupled with a misunderstanding of the African societies was a moral condemnation of the Negro "savages" and a resulting belief in their inferiority. In fact, it was the Church that sanctified this white-negro relationship.⁶ At once, they forced the slaves to accept their moral and religious doctrine, while they gave little thought to the degradation of them as human beings. Such degradation could never have been allowed by the Church if they considered the Negroes to be human enough to deserve the description of degraded. In fact, while many people were not certain that the Indian was a true human being, there was little doubt as to the inferiority of the Negro.⁷

If it was once easy to close our eyes to the degradation of the Negro in America, our modern sophistication is making it increasingly more difficult. How then can a man like Keating, who is only a product of an American negligence, continue to avoid the question in this "modern" age? I attribute this phenomenon to two factors. In the first place we are ashamed of this part of our American history. We don't want to see it in all its naked horror and therefore our guilt makes us unwilling to open our eyes. In the second place the historical and continuous existence of Jim Crow has segregated and degraded the Negro to such an extent that we want nothing to do with him. The result of this attitude therefore is to keep him right where he is.

The question now arises: how is this avoidance of the question practiced today? While the white Southerners in Alabama and Mississippi find it very easy to justify the degradation of what they call "our Nigras", it is much more difficult for the white Northerner to practice such calm righteousness. Mr. Keating's statement is a good example of Northern avoidance. His view of the problem is limited to the threat of Communist subversion and hatred against the "Americans of the Jewish faith". The only reason he considers the Black Muslims dangerous is because "dissent among the Negroes" will serve Communist interests. He has no interest at all in the degraded condition of Negroes in the United States which makes the existence of the Black Muslims possible. Nor has he an interest in improving the Negro situation for its own sake. Instead he attacks the Muslims which are only a group that is made possible by the very neglect which Senator Keating is a part of.

The Muslims are very sensitive to this neglect. Malcolm X, the former strong man of the movement, expresses this in startling terms.

"President Kennedy did not send troops to Alabama when dogs were biting black babies. He waited three weeks until the situation exploded. He then sent troops after the Negroes had demonstrated their ability to defend themselves.

"In his talk with Alabama editors, Kennedy did not urge that Negroes be treated right because it is the right thing to do. Instead he said that if the Negroes aren't well treated the Muslims would become a threat. He urged a change not because it is right but because the world is watching this country. Kennedy is wrong because his motivation is wrong.

"Instead of attacking the Ku Klux Klan and the White Citizens Committees, Kennedy attacked Islam, a religion. Although he is a member of the Roman Catholic faith, which has always complained of discrimination at the hands of the Protestants, he did not open his mouth in defence of the Negroes. We don't want to mix with the Whites and he therefore attacked us as extremists".⁸

If one argues that such neglect is on one hand attributed to an uninformed senator and on the other hand attributed by a hot-headed Black Muslim and is therefore not at all extensive, the argument collapses like a punctured balloon on further investigation. The neglect of the problem is very extensive. Without going into the problem of public apathy toward the Negro condition, or the general public denunciation of the Black Muslims, both of which the reader is quite aware of, I need only point to one of the most blatant manifestations of this neglect: the Civil Rights Bill. The pleasant, gentlemanly discussion of the bill is not taking as long as it is because of eighteen or twenty die-hard Southern senators. Everyone

knew from the beginning that they would oppose the bill and attempt to block voting by a prolonged filibuster. They could never have succeeded as they have if Northern senators and their constituents were not so concerned with a status quo mentality that binds the arm of the Federal government in enforcing what is already set forth in the Constitution and the amendments thereof. The Southerners could never have engulfed the Senate in a legislative stalemate if the Northerners were not so occupied with their own safety and their obsession of keeping the Negro in his place so he can't provoke the white man's lethargic guilt. And finally, the Senators could not persist in this polite debate over the future dignity of a human race if the white Northerners were not so shockingly apathetic.

This apathy, as I have said, is a symptom of a still deeper disease. I have dwelt upon the symptom of this "white" disease only because it is not so obvious as the symptom of the "black" disease which everyone recognizes as the Black Muslims. The connection between the two symptoms is that the white symptom consists of the attitude of mistaking the Black symptom for the disease itself. The doctor does not go about curing a disease by simply recognizing the symptom; he can only cure it by attacking the cause. It is useless to attack the Black Muslims directly; they must be attacked by a conscious effort on the part of the whites to face their own attitudes and reorient their thinking completely.

The connection between the two diseases is even more important than the correspondence of the symptoms. The white's sickness is that he has neglected a problem which he himself has caused. That is to say that the white's attitudes and actions are the direct cause of the black disease. He will never understand what Louis Lomax calls the "Negro Revolt" or

what C. E. Lincoln calls the "Black Muslims" if he does not recognize his causal role. The danger in this lack of understanding is that it can only separate the races further and accelerate the progress of the disease.

My insistence on the diseased character of the Western man's attitudes and actions is of absolute importance in a consideration of the Black Muslims. The Muslim world view can not be understood outside of the context of doubt and mistrust in which they exist. In fact, if it weren't for the mistrust of the white man, there would be no need for the Black Muslims in the first place. To put it simply, we must recognize our sins and show the Negro that we are acting in good faith. This is by no means an easy process, and we are far from realizing the goal. Until we do, however, the conditions on which the Muslims capitalize will always indicate the truth of the statements they make.

With this very important understanding we can consider the dynamics of the Negro problem and the Muslim solution. Basically, the Negroes in America find themselves within the grip of a vice. On the one hand they are totally American. When their ancestors reached the shores of the New World they were forced to sever their connections to the old way of life in Africa and accept their new status as American slaves. They were told that everything about them was evil and their only salvation was within the Christian Church. Thus they were forced to change their concept of right from an African context into an American one. If this were the only requirement of the change, the problem would be very small for the second generation. But this was not all. The American not only required that the African identify Christian morals as the good morals, but he also

had to admit that he himself was inferior to the American. In other words, he had to believe in the Christian God of brotherhood for all, while he himself was excluded from this brotherhood as an inferior being. The consequence of this belief is that he identifies with the white but hates himself. The white man who has defined the Negro as inferior treats him as an animal and thus gives to the Negro ample evidence for the conclusion that black is in fact inferior. Thus, to this very day, the American Negro despises the fact that he is not an American. He loves the white man who has only contempt for him. The American Negro cannot "go back to Africa". He has no more in common with the Africans than his fellow Americans do. He must stay here in this country and be a citizen along with the very people who exclude him from citizenship because of the color of his skin.

Where can he go? Who can he turn to? He is despised by the very culture of which he is a part. The Black Muslims are an answer to this despair but they are only one answer. The Muslims' appeal is to the lower class. The upper class, on the other hand, try as much as possible to be indistinguishable from the dominant culture. To a large extent this class believes that the only solution to the racial problem is assimilation. What such a view amounts to is a complete admission that "White is Right". This small group of upper-class Negroes tries as much as it can to avoid the consequences of being a Negro. They completely disassociate themselves from the Negro masses and will very often join in the rejection of their uncouth brethren. This group will often succeed in avoiding many of the consequences of being black; however, they can never rise out of their skin, which they will always identify as an evil. 9

The Negro middle class, which consists of the professionals and intellectuals, is usually the only class that is able to accept themselves as Negro Americans. This, represented by such men as James Baldwin and Louis Lomax, accepts their ancestry of slavery in America but is able to transcend the label of "Negro" without losing identity with the Negro race itself. This class does not abandon the Negro lower class as the upper class does and it does not accept the notion that it is unfortunate to be a Negro.¹⁰

The lower class Negro is presented with the most difficult problem of all the classes. The problem of American identification and rejection presents itself with all its undiluted ferocity to this class. Unlike the upper class, which gains recognition through its wealth, the lower class Negroes are denied this opportunity to avoid their skin. Unlike the middle class, they cannot transcend their skin, because, like all lower class people, they are dependent both socially and economically on another's view of themselves. This class must either choose to accept their status while hating their taskmaster, or reject this definition of themselves completely. The Muslims take the second road and thus, by the very nature of the movement, it has primary appeal to the lower class.

The Black Muslims are most important in the urban Negro ghettos.¹¹ Just what are Negroes subjected to in the ghettos? In the first place, they are separated physically and socially from what they most need to, be a citizen of a country. They live with "Negroes", socialize with "Negroes", and love "Negroes". They do consider themselves to be citizens but they are defined and believed to be Negroes first and Americans only by accident. When they work for whites, they will be

considered to be "Negroes" and "unreliables", the two being, for all intents and purposes synonymous. When they come back home after a day of mortification they are received by a wife who has most likely spent a similar day in the home of her more fortunate white "sister". As they walk through the hallway leading to the stairs they are greeted by the cracked walls, rat holes, and an odor that consists of a peculiar mixture of urine, cheap wine and vomit. If they are not attacked before they reach the stairs, they mount them with a slow and weary step. When they enter their room or apartment they might sit with their wives and talk about their many children. Why, they might demand of each other, has their oldest boy of sixteen become a pimp and a dope peddler? Why is their daughter of fifteen going to have a baby? What are we going to do about the money we owe to five different agencies? What are we anyway? Why does "the man" treat us so bad? Why?

In some mystical way the white man is usually to blame. Separated from meaningful intercourse with the white man, ^{WIVES} he only meets him in the most mortifying circumstances:

"The white man is the man they must meet every morning when they go to work in the garment district; the man they must meet when the rent is due; the man they must face when they go to the pawnshop, the man who comes and sells things on credit; the man who gets work when they do not; the man whom they see on TV loosing dogs on Negro children; the man they face as a school teacher who does not understand them and who is often contemptuous of them-the man, the man, the man, the goddam white man!"¹²

What does it mean to a Negro who is forced into a filthy ghetto by an emasculating white man who defines him as inferior and then gives him

every reason to believe in it? What does it mean to a man who, abandoned by his own more fortunate comrades, is cut off from any meaningful tradition and prevented from enjoying any pride in himself or his fellows? How can they feel toward "the man" who they hold responsible for the rape of their wives and daughters and their own castration? I don't think I need answer these questions.

People in such a condition must turn somewhere for consolation. Some seek escape in wine, whoring, or the needle. Others turn to each other for a sense of participation and group consciousness. For this one of the best institutions is the church. For lower class Negroes the church provides the only means through which a man can feel as if he is performing a social role. In a hostile environment the Negro Church gives the believer an opportunity to participate in a group activity, to socialize with his fellows. In a strange way he identifies the good of the church with his own good. Denied a pride in himself, he can at least have pride in his church and his minister. Denied hope in this life, he can at least have hope in the after-life.

These lower class Negroes can also turn to the Black Muslims with a glorious refrain of "Make it Plain, Mr. Minister, Make it Plain!"

For some Negroes, the hope of a better life in the future doesn't satisfy their needs in the all important present. They want to know who they are and why they are here on earth. They want to live with dignity now and they don't want to wait until they die. Social advancement is impossible for this group because they don't have the education or the means to attempt to eliminate their black skin. Thus they reject their upper class who have abandoned them and they despise the white man to whom they attribute their

own failure.

In a sense, the Black Muslim movement is an alternative to social advancement within what Elijah Mohammed would call the "white" society. They achieve this by rejecting their definition as a Negro inferior and substituting the concept of innate black superiority. This is not an easy task because, as I have tried to point out, their environment has always been inferior to the white. In fact there exist only two ways that a person can take pride in himself. The first is by engaging in activities that he can be proud of, and where this is impossible, by institutionalizing an irrational pride. When the former method is employed, the institutionalized pride, i.e., religion, usually follows. However, where advancement is curtailed, an attempt can be made to draw the cart before the horse. The Muslims have done this with amazing success. That is to say, they have defined the black man as being the primary good and they predict his ultimate deliverance.

The concept of black purity, however, is more than simply reaction to the concept of Negro inferiority. It also arises out of a passionate desire on the part of the Negro to learn something of his heritage. This desire is intense because this knowledge has always been withheld from him by society. The lower class Negro is not independent enough to identify with a tradition of degradation and they have never been able to get information about their good qualities. Their high school education is geared to American history which gives little recognition to the Negro. He is taught about the American Revolution but he is never taught about Crispus Atticus, the man who led the Americans in the Boston Massacre. The teacher talks

about scientific achievements, mechanical inventions, medicine, and mathematics, but he never tells them that Negroes have taken part in the growth of civilization. The Negro has always been taught that such things are "white man's business". Indeed there is no evidence that this is not the case. And thus when the Muslims give the Negro the "word" about his ancestors "the Negro child shrieks with pride and joy - probably for the first time in his life." ¹³

This history need not be factual, and as we shall see presently, much of it is not, but it is taught in such a way that pride in race is fostered by a mystical belief in an innate superiority. In fact only through Black Nationalism as a religion can certain "unimportant" facts be bypassed and certain myths be incorporated into history in order to validate the belief. While religion is useful for the above reason it should never be understood in terms of a plot by the religious leaders to pull the wool over the eyes of their gullible believers in order to engender hostility toward the white man. On the contrary, the Black Muslims overstate their cause in religious terms because they need the emotional satisfaction that a passionate reaction to their degraded circumstance gives them. In other words, the Muslim's alternative to social mobility is institutionalized religious reaction.

As such the Black Muslims are functionally different from the Negro Christian Church. The Negro Christian Church is not a reaction to existing social conditions but an escape into the never never land of the world to come. The church which the Muslims attack somewhat arbitrarily is not the unifying revolutionary church of the south ¹⁴ but the noncommittal and often corrupt church of the north. The Christian Church has traditionally

been an escape for the lower class Negro and has not been powerful enough to compete with the immorality of surrounding Negro ghettos. Former Minister James Baldwin ponders the question of the escapist church when he writes:

" Perhaps we were, all of us (Negroes) pimps, whores, racketeers, church members, and children - bound together by the nature of our oppression, the specific and peculiar complex of risks we had to run " ¹⁵

Baldwin also mentions his personal experience with the corruption of his fellow ministers, but he stresses that even the honest ministers could not overcome the titanic force of human degradation that existed outside the church doors: " The principles (of the Church) were Blindness, Loneliness and Terror" rather than " Faith, Hope and Charity" . ¹⁶ Indeed the brotherhood of such a church could not exist beyond the walls of the building, much less beyond the barrier of the ghetto. The Christian ministers' answer to the desperate cry of " Make it Plain" is simply, " No comment, Mr. Layman" .

On the other hand, inasmuch as the Black Muslims build their religion on social reaction, they are forced into a primarily " this-worldly" religion. Their version of creation is built around the central theme of black dignity and their eschatology is framed in terms of a deliverance from the oppression of the white man. ¹⁷

Original man, according to the Muslims, were created by Allah with a black skin. These first black men were grouped in the ancient tribe of Shabazz. Early in their history they moved to the Nile Valley in Egypt and to Mecca where they found the climate most suitable to human habitation. Once settled, these original black men created great civilizations that con-

stituted the "Nation of Islam". The "so-called American Negro"¹⁸ is a descendant of this ancient tribe of Shubazz which is so loved by their creator, God Allah. The white man, on the other hand, was the creation of a dissident scientist, Yacub, who discovered the technique of skin-grafting and was thus enabled over a period of five or six hundred years, to gradually form the white man from the black man. This creation was a great scientific success for Yacub but the white man was created at a price. While his skin was indeed white, he had lost moral and physical excellence in the transformation. The history of this white race was rather dismal for a while. In the first period they wandered around in the caves of Europe, living like animals. Their moral inferiority was proved by the fact that they did not recognize Allah as their god but insisted on a Christian or white god. Today they prove themselves still to be devils by subjugating Allah's chosen people, the descendants of the ancient tribe of Shubazz.

Allah allowed the white devil to enslave his people in order to test the black race. But He has become tired and enraged at the white devil's atrocities. The Muslims believe that Allah will soon destroy the white devil and deliver the black man to his rightful place in the world. Elijah Mohammed, who is considered to be the prophet of Allah, is the man who will deliver them. Elijah declares that in order to deliver the so-called Negro in America, all black men must unite and return to the fold of the Nation of Islam. Every black man is part of this nation within a nation but the white devil has brain-washed the black men and he uses Christianity, (the white man's religion) to hold his "Uncle Toms" in subjugation and disorganization. Thus the Muslims call to all black men to worship their God Allah and throw off the bondage of the white devil:

"In the Name of Allah the Beneficent, the Merciful. All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds. Master of the Day of Judgement. I bear witness that there is none to be worshipped but Allah, and that Muhammed is his servant and last messenger. O Allah, Bless Muhammed here in the wilderness of North America and bless the followers of Muhammed too as thou didst bless Abraham and the followers of Abraham. O Allah make Muhammed successful and his followers of Muhammed successful here in the wilderness of North America as thou didst make Abraham successful and the followers of Abraham. For surely art Praised and Magnified in our Midst. Amen." 19

Thus the Black Muslims hold their excellence and dignity as an article of faith. Once believed in, they are quite willing to appeal to this dignity as a divine personification of themselves. Similarly, they can justify their necessary rejection of the white man on the same grounds. He is a devil, Allah has shown him to be a devil.

But Allah isn't alone. The Negro has always known that the white man is a devil. When Elijah Mohammed tells his brethren that they are the Nation of Islam within the Nation of North America, they have always known it but the feeling had never before been objectified into an article of faith. The Negro who has always hated "the man" has hated himself all the more. The Negro who had always felt as if he were set apart in America had always hated the color of his skin. Imagine the delight of such a man when he is told that his unchangeable situation is healthy; that his skin is beautiful; that his vague uncertainties about his separateness, qualified him to be a part of a real nation of brothers; that his race qualified him as a part of the Chosen People.

In fact, Elijah Mohammed is telling the Negro what he has always felt but which he has been ashamed of in the past. Thus freed from

his guilt and endowed with a divine mission, the Black Muslim believer is ready to listen to Mr. Mohammed's program for strengthening his "Nation". The most important principle of this religion is the rejection of the notion of an after-life. The salvation of man in the Christian religion is translated into a notion which is very close to the Judaic idea of national deliverance. The final Judgment of Allah will judge the white man and punish him for his sins by his total destruction and the subsequent deliverance of the black race.

Yes

Within this religion the Black Muslims exhibit two basic characteristics. The first is the absolute rejection of the white man and the second is the need to form a unified black nation which is separated from the white man.

To say that the Black Muslims reject the white man out of a spirit of revenge, is to distort the picture entirely. While it would be perfectly understandable if this were their motive, they could never have gained strength with such an emphasis. On the contrary, the Muslims are driven by a sense of distrust and emasculation. This rejection takes the form of the abolition of the symbols of the white man, both religious and secular. In order to rid themselves of their inferior definition, they reject the term "Negro". The Muslims believe that the term implies inferiority when used by the white man. They hold that all those that call themselves "Negro" are brain-washed "Uncle Toms" who accept their inferior status. They further insist that "so-called Negroes" must reject the name that his former slave master gave him and regain his true name which was taken from him by the white man. By this act the Muslim symbolically severs all identification with the white man and re-joins his own people in the semi-mystical

divine Nation of Islam. Thus by regaining his original name the black man can regain union within his true God, Allah. In this sense Allah is the totality of all "Black Men" but is superior to them in power and wisdom.

The final step of severance comes with the acceptance of the Muslim doctrine of divine Black dignity and the absolute rejection of Christianity. Christianity in the Muslim view is a white devil's trick to keep the "so-called Negro" in subjugation. The Christians worship a false white God which tells the Negroes to wait until they are dead in order to have peace and security. The Christian religion thus dopes the so-called Negro by filling him with false hope of another life. The so-called Negro Christian then refuses to stand like a man and resist his white oppressors. Instead he believes in loving his enemy who has only contempt and hatred for him. Belief in Allah and the teachings of Elijah Mohammed, on the other hand, show the black man that the white man will soon be judged and destroyed. Why, they ask, should we love a man whom Allah hates. No, they say, love your own kind because you are God. ?

The language that the Muslim leaders use in this connection is very interesting. The very first time Malcolm X published his views in public was in an article in the New York Amsterdam News, Saturday, May 4, 1957. I am going to quote this article at some length, because in this article, Malcolm voiced Mohammed's teachings in a pure unadulterated form, with the explicit aim of getting converts to Islam:

"Fear ruled us but not the fear of God. We had fear only of the white slave master. We were afraid to let the white slave master even see us advocating or practicing unity and love

toward our own kind.

"We had no knowledge of truth, we were not man enough to stand up and protect our own kind from the lynchers rope, and from the slave masters acts of rape, but at the same time we would go around the world to fight others in behalf of this murderous beast like race. (Daniel 7:11... Rev. 20:10)

"We practiced love of others (the white race) while hating our own kind, patience with others and impatience with our own kind. Unity with others, disunity with our own kind. We called ourselves Negro Christians. Yet we remained an ignorant, foolish people, despised and rejected by the white Christians whom we so greatly admired. What fools we were (Luke 16:19-21, Luke 15-16).

"An earth-shaking reformation is taking place among the so-called Negroes in America (Ezek. 37:1-14, Isa. 9)

"Almighty Allah has appeared in our midst and raised from among us a reformer (Isa. 35:1-10, 41:1-4, 42+1-25) in the person of Elijah Mohammed the Messenger, with a message (John 6:28) for us mentally dead so-called Negroes in America (Matt. 24, Dan. 12:1-4)

"His message clearly shows how the "Christianity" offered us by our Christian slave master (Baal himself Rev. 2:14-15) and his false preachers (I Kings 18:22), has failed to give us Freedom, Justice and Equality....

"Be wise! Examine and study Messenger Mohammed's teachings for yourself. Weigh it in your own minds. Write to him or come to Temple #7. Your future life is at stake."

This text reveals Malcolm at his best. Grounded in the Biblical tradition, he drums his exciting doctrine into vibrating language. His

appeal, however, also reveals to whom he aims his sermon. And finally, it reveals from where his doctrine arises. Malcolm's Gospel is grounded in the tradition of the American Negro Ghetto, not on the shores of Asia Minor or the Arabian desert. His insistence on the term "so-called Negro" comes directly from the distrust fostered by the segregated and degraded living experience of the ghetto. His rejection of Christianity and the ensuing hope of a promised deliverance is an attempt to combat this same degradation in the ghetto. But much more important, this passage reveals a very basic sensitivity of the Muslims. This is the sexual emasculation of the Negro male. Malcolm's imagery is very vivid when he speaks about the Negro's willingness to open his arms to the man who beats him and rapes his wife. This feeling of emasculation is a necessary part of a degraded ghetto life. The man who can't get a job to support his pregnant wife feels this with great intensity. The Negro also carries the brunt of the white man's image of his "sexy" Negro wife. Indeed he knows that his white brothers consider his race to be human enough to rape. The degraded male also finds that his wife plays a dominant role in the family and he reacts to this further humiliation with aggression, violence and disrespect.

The Black Muslim's reaction to these feelings is on the one hand, to religiously eliminate these definitions which the degraded Negro thinks all white men hold against him and on the other hand, to insist that he be a man, a black man at that.

The notion of black manhood brings us to the all important subject of the Black Muslim "Nation of Islam". "Real men, don't put their children on the firing line", says Malcolm X in reference to the non violent

tragedy in Birmingham, Alabama. ²⁰ Real men have dignity. Real men have power. Real men have a land of their own. Real men love their own people. They fight back when attacked. They stand upright and refuse to lick the boot that kicks them in the mouth.

In an absolute sense, the black man who returns to the Nation of Islam is re-incarnated, and becomes once again a "Real Man". The concept of the "Nation", as I have said before, has some relation to reality, inasmuch as the Negro actually forms, to some extent, a nation within a nation. The Muslim notion, however, translates this vague identity into an objective religious reality. Thus the shameful connotation of the inferior Negro identity is abolished and the real existence of a separate identity is believed in. This concept of separateness is thus a completely religious attitude which endows the believer with a real and substantial identity.

It is very important to understand that the notion of the Nation of Islam and the corresponding hope of deliverance to a separate land in this country is a religious concept and not a political one. The Muslims believe that Allah will judge and destroy the white man for his sins and deliver his people to a good life on this earth. They do not, as many people believe, advocate violence to attain their political goals. In fact, this is the very antithesis of their doctrine of peace and respect for authority. It is true that they preach self defense and ultimate destruction of the white devils but the one is to preserve the dignity of the people and the other is to offer hope for a political salvation. The strength of these romantic religious notions is thus not in the reality of the social environment but in the willingness to identify themselves with a divine race which holds roots in the old world. These notions are further fortified by the

emergence of independent African nations. Unable to admit to their affinity to a society which is hostile to them, the American lower class Negro quite naturally identifies himself with the Africans who have been able to throw out their white overlords. His concept of nationhood thus has a model in the real African environment. In this way he is able to solidify his idea of "nation" without recognizing the difference between the American and African context.

Thus by combining his idea of ^aspiritual "nation" (i.e., the Black Race) with the African model of a political nation, the Muslim is able to view himself as part of a separate and (soon to be) independent society. The Muslims further encourage such a notion by their quasi-political organization. The Church not only has a hierarchy of "civilian" officers (from Elijah Mohammed and his cabinet, to the Ministers and their Committees) but it also has a para-military society called the Fruit of Islam. In this sense the Black Muslims are a theocracy. Acceptance of Allah is thus more than a religion, it is a way of life.

Ironic as it may seem, the Black Muslim way of life is completely American. Logically enough, the Muslims don't really adopt a way of life suitable to the desert. They really have nothing at all to do with the desert Moslems. The Muslims have grown from an American Negro problem and they follow a truly American pattern.

yes. Especially in economic goals - A sort of super "Protestant ethic". O.K. see p. 27

The racial identification of the Muslims confines their program to strictly Negro aspirations, and their this-worldly religion limits them to completely secular aims.²¹ All the goals of the movement aim at endowing the believer with a sense of dignity and power. The ultimate result they hope will give the Negro real power. Their call for unity endows

the Negro with a sense of fraternity but the end result, they hope, will be the possession of a real state which, they believe, the United States owes them in payment for the three hundred years of slavery. For the meantime, however, it is up to the black man to educate himself, and become independent economically. The Muslim's distrust the "white devils'" education because it does not "teach the black man about himself". This distrust is a reaction to the deplorable education that the ghetto Negro actually receives. While this is a rather unfortunate alternative, it is at least an attempt of a religious group to "educate their own".

The American ideal of equal education is not the only native virtue the Muslims hold. They also believe in economic independence. While separation is impossible, the Muslims insist that each church member have a job. If they can't find one, their brothers try to help them out. Further, the Muslims don't allow their members to buy on credit because they believe that debt makes the black man a slave to the devil. Their insistence on economic independence leads them to support Negro business with the result that many Negro businessmen are favorable to the Muslims. In substance, then, the Muslims insist on economic rationality, something which can only benefit the practitioner of such a policy.

The final, and most important manifestations of what might be called the "Muslim-American ideals" are the Muslims' puritanical morals. In fact (to translate the thought into Muslim language) the Muslims are more "white" than the white man. Once the believer has become a Muslim, he must completely change his sinful way of life. He may not smoke, drink, or take dope. He is forbidden to eat certain foods, and he is encouraged to

eat only one meal a day. Further, he is held completely responsible for supporting his wife and must show her absolute respect. Adultery would mean, at the least, suspension from the Temple and probable expulsion. The woman, for her part, must show complete respect for her man and is also held responsible for the proper education of her children. The Muslims also insist on complete respect for authority as well as respect for everyone who is part of the mystical Nation of Islam. Their slogan is Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, and all Muslims are expected to practice these virtues.

Because the moral rules are so strict and all-inclusive, many Negroes can't adapt to them, and though they go along with most of the other Muslim beliefs and practices, they remain outside the church itself. In fact, it is those white hating Negroes who remain outside the temple that are the real danger to society. For while the Muslims believe in self-defense, they insist that their followers never be on the offensive. This teaching is meant to prevent unnecessary violence and to preserve dignity for the Muslims. For those who are able to adapt, on the other hand, the moral laws form a comfortable atmosphere in which to live. The moral laws raise them from the moral degradation from which they came. And finally, these laws allow the believer dignity instead of self hate. In this way the Muslims counteract the strong force of indignity with an exaggerated insistence on moral perfection. At the same time they benefit the total society with a useful orientation instead of a destructive one.

The tragedy of the Black Muslims is that they are forced to be reactionary, Their functional role in the Negro subculture and the

society at large is almost completely mitigated by their irrational and hostile attitudes toward the white race. The source and cause of this need for reaction can be attributed to white contempt and neglect. The historical contempt that the white race held for the Negroes has created a group of rootless degraded people. The current neglect of the problem can only irritate this deplorable state of affairs. The Black Muslims should constitute a warning to our society, a warning that must be heeded if we are to preserve the society. The road to freedom must be uphill, even if it is arduous and frustrating. A people must have dignity and identify. If they can't do it peacefully, they will do it defensively.

Very well written!
Poses a problem for me —
as this is only secondary
a sociological job
nevertheless, this you have not
used sociological concepts,
important sociological insights
are contained in your paper.

Notes

1. New York Post, August 18, 1959
2. When I use the term "white man" that doesn't imply that I join the Muslims in condemning all white men. I use the term as the Muslims would use it.
3. The Muslims never refer to the Negro without qualifying the noun with "so-called".
4. James Baldwin. The Fire Next Time - Delta Book PP. 60
5. Ibid. PP 59
6. There are obvious exceptions to this rule. John Brown is the most obvious. I am not saying, however, that the Church always took an active role in denouncing the Negro as inferior. Although it did this in the beginning, and it still does it in the south today, the Church has always sanctified the idea of inferiority by a passive neglect of the problem. It is interesting, in this connection, that the Christian Church was among the last institutions to voice an active concern in the civil rights struggle in America.
7. Bartolome De Las Casas was a good example of such thinking.
8. Herald Tribune-May 15, 1963
9. For a more complete description of the Negro upper class I refer you to Black Nationalism-A Search for Identity in America, E. U. Essien Udom and Black Muslims in America by C. E. Lincoln.
10. I find it very interesting to note in this connection that both James Baldwin and Louis Lomax express a certain ambivalence toward the Black Muslim movement. This is more than a simple admission of its functional aspects, which such men as C. E. Lincoln and E. U. Essien Udom skillfully portray in their books. For Baldwin and Lomax the Black Muslims is a source of great pride as well as a bit of a menace. They are proud that a group of Negroes is finally lashing out at the white man; something they would have liked to do at many points in their life. While they understand the irrationality and danger of the sentencing of the white man, they take more than a little joy in the concept of black brotherhood and dignity.
11. For a moving description of Harlem, I refer you to The Fire Next Time by James Baldwin.
12. When the Word is Given by Louis Lomax, World Pub. Co. PP 68.
13. Ibid.
14. The Muslims actually make no distinction in their condemnation of the white man's religion; however their actual reaction is to the noncommittal church of the Northern Negro ghetto. My description of the Negro Church refers to the Church of the ghetto which is only slowly waking up.
15. The Fire Next Time by James Baldwin, PP 55
16. Ibid.

Notes

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17. For a detailed account of The Muslim eschatology I refer you to Black Nationalism: A Search for Identity in America, by E. E. Eason, Chapter V
18. The Muslims insist on preceding the term Negro by "so-called". They reject the word on the ground that it carries with it the notion of inferiority.
19. Black Muslim Opening Prayer
20. New York Times, May 18, 1963
21. I use the word secular to mean this - worldly. I don't mean political

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