



# A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States, Volume 2

*The African American Islamic  
Renaissance, 1920–1975*

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BRILL Cover illustration: "Sheik Daouod with Arab Moslem and two Negro Moslems", from page 49, *PM Weekly*,  
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During those nine years, Majid's time in New York City was devoted primarily to two activities. The first of these was attempting to find financial assistance and employment for immigrant Muslim ship workers who were living in the city.<sup>43</sup> Majid, who had most likely been a maritime worker himself as a young man,<sup>44</sup> wrote letters to the British consulate-general and John D. Rockefeller asking for this assistance, explaining that these sailors—who were probably Sudanese, Yemeni, and South Asian—had lived in British territory and had worked on British ships, so therefore, in Majid's opinion, they deserved the British government's aid.<sup>45</sup> Evidence suggests that through these efforts Majid developed a reputation, particularly with the local Sudanese community, as a caring religious figure.

The second activity that Majid devoted his time to in New York City was promoting Islam to local African Americans, and there is evidence that Majid made a number of African American converts in the city.<sup>46</sup> However, the most important black American who seems to have joined with Majid and proselytized in his name was possibly not himself a convert: **Sheikh Daoud Ahmed Faisal**.<sup>47</sup> Though he would only come to prominence in the second phase of Sunni Islam in the AAIR, in the late 1920s Faisal—then known as David A. Donald—was Majid's representative at 128th and Lenox Avenue in Harlem, where he, like Majid, reached out to Muslim maritime workers and African American converts.<sup>48</sup> While very little is known about the details of Faisal's 1920s Islamic activities, his professional and personal life at the time and his later religious work is relatively well-documented and will be discussed in connection to the next phases.

From at least 1924 to 1927, Majid was also residing part-time, possibly with his family, in Buffalo in an apartment above the coffee shop that served as the center of the city's Muslim community.<sup>49</sup> The available evidence suggests that

43 Abu Shouk et al., "Sudanese Missionary," 144.

44 Abu Shouk et al., "Sudanese Missionary," 140.

45 Abu Shouk et al., "Sudanese Missionary," 140; Bald, "Hands."

46 Abusharaf, *Wanderings*, 22–23, 30–32.

47 Rumors disagree as to whether Sheikh Daoud really did promote Islam in the 1920s; he frequently said he did, and some others have attested to this as well, but there are several Muslims who are adamant that he did not. In the present book, I will assume that he did since I have not yet seen persuasive evidence otherwise.

48 See the section on Sheikh Daoud below for citations.

49 Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage*, 285n1; Bald, "Hands across the Water," 211, 230, 233; "Descendant"; Abu Shouk et al., "Sudanese Missionary," 154n41. Buffalo, in fact, was the very city

by saying that the Israelites, like African Americans, were ‘sealed’ from God by Pharaoh, who took their name and religion.<sup>112</sup> Moses, Ezaldeen explained, was sent by God to break the seal for the Israelites, and ‘we’—African American Muslims—must break the seal that has been put on black people by America’s ‘Pharaoh Government.’<sup>113</sup> By combining MSTA-connected notions with Sunni Islam, Ezaldeen had found a way to give MSTA-type ideas—which already had incredible appeal for African Americans—more legitimacy in the eyes of international Muslims, thereby increasing African American Islam’s own legitimacy and authority, at least in the eyes of his followers.<sup>114</sup>

On December 4, 1936, Ezaldeen—now using the title ‘professor’—returned to the US, arriving in New York City.<sup>115</sup> There, he, along with another Egyptian immigrant, began teaching both Arabic and Islamic doctrines for an MSTA break-off group called the Moorish National Islamic Center.<sup>116</sup> It is likely that sometime during the late 1930s Ezaldeen encountered a man named David A. Donald, Satti Majid’s former representative in Harlem. Ezaldeen reportedly became Donald’s mentor in Islam, and, probably largely due to Ezaldeen’s influence, by 1939 Donald had publicly adopted an Islamic name (Daoud Faisal), quit his career as a musician, and opened an Islamic mosque and mission.<sup>117</sup> In 1937, Ezaldeen would also serve as a teacher in a short-lived New York City

112 AAUAA FBI file, Report, 10/9/1943, Philadelphia file 100–19940, 18.

113 AAUAA FBI file, Report, 10/9/1943, Philadelphia file 100–19940, 18–19.

114 The FBI even remarked on how close Ezaldeen’s group was organizationally and ideologically to the MSTA; see Hill, *RACON*, 547.

115 AAUAA FBI file, Report, 3/22/1944, Newark file 100–18924, 35–36; *Ancestry.com*. New York Passenger Lists, 1820–1957 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: *Ancestry.com*, accessed September 22, 2011.

116 MSTA FBI file, Report, 8/18/1943, New York, 100–33742, *passim*; AAUAA FBI file, Report, 4/19/1943, New York file 100–45717, 2; AAUAA FBI file, letter, E.E. Conroy, SAC, to Director, FBI, 7/30/1943, 2.

117 Hesham Jaaber, in his *The Final Chapter ... I Buried Malcolm (Haj Malik El-Shabazz)* (Jersey City: Hesham Jaaber, 1992), claims that Ezaldeen was Sheikh Daoud Faisal’s “mentor” (see page 81). While Jaaber does not give a date for Faisal and Ezaldeen’s first contact, they definitely had known each other by 1943 (the year of the first UISA meeting, with which Faisal was associated), and if they did come into contact in the late 1930s, this would help explain why it was only after Ezaldeen returned from the Middle East, when he was starting numerous groups, that Faisal decided to establish his own mosque. Also Faisal’s New York and Satti Majid connections, as well as his claims that his father was Moroccan (a claim that was common in the MSTA) are other pieces of circumstantial evidence that further support an early tie between Faisal and Ezaldeen.

### *New York City*

Although, as we have seen, a number of Muslim groups had been connecting with African Americans in New York City since the 1920s, between the early 1930s and the early 1940s, three groups stood out as being particularly influential for the city's black Sunnis: the **Islamic Mission of America**, the Moorish National Islamic Center, and the Academy of Islam. Like many of the other Islamic movements of this era, these three organizations reflected both the de- and reterritorializing currents that were flowing through the AAIR at the time.

One of the most important Muslims of this period was **David A. Donald**, an immigrant who had come to New York from the Grenada in 1913 at the age of twenty-one.<sup>141</sup> Skilled as both a tailor and as a violinist, within a decade Donald had developed a relatively successful career in the music industry,<sup>142</sup> playing the violin professionally, but also working as a music and elocution teacher, musician manager, and, for a time, a musicians' union leader.<sup>143</sup> At the age of thirty-two, he married **Clara Forbes**, a black Bermudan, who joined her husband teaching students at his Donald Concert Bureau,<sup>144</sup> and in the following year Donald became a naturalized US citizen.<sup>145</sup> Although he did not publicly portray himself as a Muslim during this period, Donald would later claim that his father was a Muslim from a prominent Moroccan family—a clue that suggests that Donald may have been a former member of the MSTA.<sup>146</sup>

141 Ship manifest for the S.S. *Maracas*, June 6, 1913, available at *Ancestry.com*. Later in life he would claim to have been born in Morocco, but this record clearly indicates otherwise.

142 Ibid. These facts are confirmed by him in a 1965 interview cited below.

143 "Hughes and Costas in Recital," *New York Age*, October 29, 1921, 5; "Music Notes: A New Journal," *New York Age*, November 5, 1921, 5; "Munkacsy's Violin Recital," *New York Age*, December 17, 1921, 5; "Manhattan and the Bronx," *New York Age*, June 7, 1924, 8. Donald also edited and managed the union's weekly magazine.

144 Thelma E. Berlack, "Chatter and Chimes," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 21, 1924, 13; "Manhattan and the Bronx"; 1930 Census, Brooklyn, New York, available at *Ancestry.com*. Also see Leslie Hanscom, "Naturalized American Converts Boroites to Mohammedanism," *Brooklyn Eagle*, June 4, 1950, 34.

145 Ship manifest of S.S. *Queen of Bermuda*, November 19, 1937 and flight manifest for Pan-American Airways, December 30, 1948; both documents are available on *Ancestry.com*.

146 Lawrence Farrant, "The Days of Ramadan," *New York World-Telegram*, January 5, 1965, B1. Although he claims in this article that he and (presumably) his father were born in Morocco, this is contradicted by the information he gave in his 1913 ship manifest report and the 1930 census; see the above notes. The ship manifest, in fact, indicates that his father's name was (what appears to be) Adrian—a notably non-Islamic name. Sulayman Nyang tells us that Faisal's father was Moroccan while his mother was Grenadian; see his "The US and Islam: The Stuff that Dreams are Made of," 25.

It is likely that Donald's claimed Islamic background and his ability to teach and lead people are what influenced Satti Majid to choose him as his Harlem representative.<sup>147</sup> By 1928, Donald, who did not use an Islamic name at this time, was working at 128th and Lenox Avenue with local Muslim converts and the Muslim ship workers whom Majid had been helping.<sup>148</sup> During this period, he did not make Islamic work his vocation and rarely used references to Islam in his professional life; however, this habit would start slowly eroding in the 1930s when Donald began taking a greater professional interest in African and Islamic themes, even writing and producing a play in 1933 about the life of Almamy Samory Touré.<sup>149</sup>

In the late 1930s, probably largely due to the influence of Ezaldeen, Donald, as he later recalled, "became fully aware for the first time of the world's need for prayer."<sup>150</sup> He and his wife dissolved their concert bureau, took Muslim names (Daoud Ahmed and Khadija Faisal), and committed themselves to their

147 As mentioned earlier, that Donald promoted Islam in the 1920s is a contested claim. In fact, I have even heard a rumor that he first came to Sunni Islam through the Academy of Islam, a group that will be discussed below.

148 Farrant, "Days of Ramadan"; Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf, "Structural Adaptations in an Immigrant Muslim Congregation in New York," in *Gatherings in Diaspora*, eds. R. Stephen Warner and Judith G. Wittner (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 243–44; "Eyes to the East: Muslims Follow Koran in Boro," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 29, 1958, 21; "Negroes Most Popular Topic Overseas, Says Muslim Head," *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 9, 1961, 5. In a number of Donald's newspaper appearances in the 1920s and 1930s, he is participating in activities taking place close to this intersection, and his Concert Bureau in the early 1930s was located there, at 108 W. 128th St. McCould claims, however, that his religious "efforts" started in 1924, that he claimed that "he received a letter of permission from [the country of] Jordan to 'legitimately' spread Islam in 1925," and in 1929 the IMA was opened (Aminah Beverly McCloud, *African American Islam* [New York: Routledge, 1995], 22, 10). Muhammed al-Ahari says that Faisal's 1928 center was called the Islamic Propagation Center of America, see Shaykh Daoud A. Faisal, *Al-Islam: The True Faith, the Religion of Humanity. The works of Hajj Shaykh Daoud Ahmed Faisal*, ed. Muhammed al-Ahari (Chicago: Magribine Press, 2006), 7.

149 "Kumba' to Newark," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 5, 1936, 8; "African Opera Opens Monday," *New York Amsterdam News*, August 15, 1936, 8; *Catalogue of Copyright Entries*, volume 6, number 6 (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1933), 165. "African Drama is Planned for B'way," *New York Age*, December 2, 1933, 6. Africans—including some African Muslims—were among the actors involved in these productions. It is interesting to note that Donald would later claim his family had fought with Touré against the French; see Faisal, *Al-Islam: The True*, 7.

150 Hanscom, "Naturalized American"; Margaret Mara, "'Muslim' Prays Five Times a Day," *Brooklyn Eagle*, May 7, 1952, 19. It is unknown what led to this awareness.

religion. In 1939, they converted their apartment at 143 State Street in Brooklyn into a mosque and mission for indigent Muslims, naming it the Islamic Mission of America (IMA), and it quickly became one of the most popular mosques in New York City.<sup>151</sup> Though influenced by Ezaldeen, the Faisals' message, which Daoud spread in the several books and pamphlets that he began to write and edit, was closer to Majid's, as it was Pan-Islamic, anti-racist, and concerned with justice for African Americans, while lacking any discussion of African Americans' supposed Hamitic origins.<sup>152</sup> Also reflecting Majid's influence was the fact that the IMA's members were very diverse ethnically; the community included both white and black converts as well as immigrants from all across the Muslim world.<sup>153</sup> Sudanese immigrants, in particular, embraced both the IMA and Daoud, who, it was said, developed a special fondness for them due to the influence of Majid.<sup>154</sup> By the 1950s, as we will see in Chapter 11, Sheikh Daoud would add several other skills to his repertoire and would become one of the most active and influential Muslim leaders in the US.<sup>155</sup>

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- 151 Hanscom, "Naturalized American"; Ari L. Goldman, "Sayedah Khadijah Faisal is Dead," *New York Times*, September 10, 1992, D21; Marc Ferris, "To Achieve the Pleasure of Allah': Immigrant Muslim Communities in New York City 1893–1991" in *Muslim Communities in North America*, eds. Yvonne Y. Haddad and Jane I. Smith (Albany: State University of New York, 1994), 212–13; "1st Islamic Mission in City's History is Opened Here," *Brooklyn Eagle*, October 4, 1944, 20; "Moslems Chant Prayers Near Borough Hall," *Brooklyn Eagle*, September 4, 1944, 7; "Boro's Mohammedans Greet Their New Year," *Brooklyn Eagle*, November 27, 1944, 4; "Islam in New York," *Anderson Daily Bulletin* (Indiana), April 23, 1959, [19?]. In 1946, in fact, the wrestler Reginald 'Siki' Barry (who took the Islamic name Kemal Abd-ur-Rahman) made the Mission his home; see "Colorful Sepia Wrestler Looms on Local Front," *California Eagle*, June 24, 1946, 14. There may be some question as to whether the IMA was originally in Brooklyn: a New York newspaper noted in 1942 that black Muslims were meeting in Faisal's home in Harlem—though this may be a mistake on the part of the newspaper; see "Moslems: New York City's 5000 Pray for Democracy," *P.M.'s Weekly*, January 18, 1942, 49.
- 152 Daoud's writings include *Al-Islam, the Religion of Humanity* (Brooklyn: Islamic Mission of America, 1950), *Islam: The True Faith, the Religion of Humanity* (Brooklyn: Islamic Mission of America, 1965), and *Islam for Peace and Survival* ([Brooklyn]: Islamic Mission of America, n.d.) (a copy of which is in the Cleveland Sellers Papers, Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, College of Charleston).
- 153 See, for example, "Moslems Chant." We have very little information about the early black members of this group; however, we do know of at least one individual, Hajj Hamdi Bey, who was a former Moor; see Mayes, "Muslims of African Descent," 47, 77–79.
- 154 See Abusharaf, "Structural," 243–44; R.M. Mukhtar Curtis, "Urban Muslims: The Formation of the Dar ul-Islam Movement" in *Muslim Communities in North America*, eds. Yvonne Y. Haddad and Jane I. Smith (Albany: State University of New York, 1994), 54.
- 155 See Patrick D. Bowen, "The Search for 'Islam': African American Islamic Groups in NYC,

During this period, Sheikh Daoud was not the only African American with claimed Moroccan roots interacting with immigrant Muslims. The FBI files on the MSTA indicate that several New York City MSTA temples had their own immigrant affiliations.<sup>156</sup> On one occasion the FBI interviewed a foreign Muslim sailor who “act[ed] as a teacher” for an unidentified Moorish temple. Another immigrant had first come in contact with the MSTA by as early as 1935 when he attended Frederick Turner-El’s group, but he later joined an organization, which had possibly been established by Ezaldeen, known as the Moorish Science Temple Church (aka the Moorish National Institute, Inc., and Mosque number 34) in Brooklyn. Interestingly, this immigrant Muslim claimed that the group, though it was recognized by Kirkman Bey’s MSTA, Inc., “follow[ed] the teaching of Mohammed.” At its peak, in 1941, seventy-five to eighty families had joined, but by 1944 the numbers had dropped precipitously to around only a dozen total members.<sup>157</sup>

The New York MSTA organization that seems to have been most impacted by international orthodox Islam during the 1930s and 1940s was MSTA Temple No. 41, located at 1 East 125th Street and led by Grand Sheik Walter Price Bey.<sup>158</sup> Price Bey, who was an inspector for a black-owned insurance company, and his wife Rezkah, a chiropractor, were somewhat well-known figures in New York’s African American community, occasionally appearing in the *New York Amsterdam News’s* society page.<sup>159</sup> Though their temple was started as a Kirkman Bey organization, beginning at least as early as 1935, a number of immigrant Muslims joined and sometimes taught the group, which had about fifty to sixty regularly-attending members. One Egyptian immigrant laborer told the FBI that when he was a member, from 1935 to 1941, he “taught a class of approximately 50 children the Arabic language and Moslem religion.” During

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1904–1954,” *Muslim World* 102 (2012): 267–68; “Negroes Most Popular Topic” and “Sheikh Stops in Hayward to Lecture,” *Daily Review* (Haywood, CA), February 8, 1956, 29.

156 See Bowen, “Search for ‘Islam,’” 270–77.

157 Bowen, “Search for ‘Islam,’” 276–77.

158 Bowen, “Search for ‘Islam,’” 275–76.

159 “Prexy Sees Dawn of New Day for Negro Insurance Company,” *New York Age*, May 2, 1936, 2; “Rita Francis Turns Nineteen with Gaiety,” *New York Amsterdam News*, December 5, 1936, 10; “Progress is Shown by Insurance Co,” *New Journal and Guide*, May 14, 1938, 9; T.E.B., “Chatter and Chimes,” *New York Amsterdam News*, December 16, 1939, 16; “Gets Degree,” *New York Amsterdam Star-News*, August 30, 1941, 4; “Socially Speaking,” *New York Amsterdam News*, April 5, 1947, 9; “Friends Crowd Chantilly for Adelle D’Jebra,” *New York Amsterdam News*, April 5, 1952, 10; Gerri Major, “Gerri-Go-Round,” *New York Amsterdam News*, December 20, 1952, 11.



## Non-NOI Muslims in the Postwar Period

In 1958, Louis E. Burnham, an African American columnist for the radical leftist weekly *The National Guardian*, while discussing the NOI's rise commented that it was "an anomaly that just at the time the fight against segregation has scored significant victories, [a] movement should arise among Negroes rejecting integration and social equality as a devilish snare and delusion."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, at first glance it is rather surprising that the NOI—with its separationist, anti-integrationist, and deeply racialized rhetoric—was growing by leaps and bounds precisely when African Americans were winning social and political victories for equality through the integrationist-based civil rights movement.

The post-1942 NOI's unique proselytization pattern—with its relatively heavy reliance on convicts and street people, along with its ability to bring in former black nationalists, non-NOI Muslims, and the social networks of all of the above—certainly explains some of this phenomenon. In the 1950s, no civil rights organization was making serious headway among such populations. On the contrary, *church* ties were key for the development of the early civil rights movement; according to one estimate, over ninety-eight percent of the civil rights activists in Birmingham and Montgomery—the sites of two of the largest civil rights activist communities of the 1950s—were church members.<sup>2</sup> Still, this does not seem to fully explain how it was that the NOI's 'uncommitted masses' came to number probably tens of thousands.

One of the factors that can help shed light the NOI's enormous popularity is region. Particularly before the 1960s, the NOI was an overwhelmingly Northern and Western phenomenon, whereas the civil rights movement was concentrated primarily in the South. Although Northern churches and other voluntary organizations supported the civil rights movement, they generally did so from afar; the vast majority of the movement's nonviolent direct action activities were located in the South. The South provided the movement's mass base and organizational core, and it was there where whole communities were sometimes mobilized behind church leaders to march in the streets and hold sit-ins. This phenomenon did not occur in the North even close to the same extent;

<sup>1</sup> Louis E. Burnham, "The Spectator: Our Own Islam," *National Guardian*, July 28, 1958, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Morris, *Origins*, 74.

therefore outside of the South there was far less social pressure pushing, and social networks pulling, African Americans to join up with the Christian-based movement. Northern and Western African Americans were thus freer to follow other paths that appealed to them. And since, as we have seen, the Nation's programs and the folk basis of its doctrines were deeply attractive to many people, it is easy to understand how African Americans might have ended up at least interested in the Muslims' teachings.

At the same time, one of the inadvertent effects of the successes of the civil rights movement was the raising of expectations, which produced a growing desire for more aggressive approaches to black liberation. The civil rights movement's hallmark of nonviolent direct action was itself partially birthed by this very phenomenon. When states failed to immediately implement school desegregation after the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, many African Americans realized that although the legalistic approach of the NAACP had indeed made significant progress for blacks, now what was needed were additional, on-the-ground activities to force the changes that were not being applied. Then, after local civil rights movements began succeeding in shifting business and city policies regarding segregation, this emboldened activists to take ever more daring actions in the name of obtaining equality. The 'fearless' views of the Muslims, then, were probably often seen as the next logical step in the struggle for black liberation. The civil rights movement had, in effect, begun shattering many African Americans' notions regarding what was 'impossible.' It had, to put it in sociological terms, led to the de facto deregulation of African American identity, philosophy, and religiosity—and this, in turn, produced an increase in both religious diversity and commitment.

According to sociologists of religion Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, the reason that there is not just increased religious diversity but often increased religious commitment in a time and location with recently-deregulated religion is that

a) Even though the religious market expands as a result of deregulation, there is still not an infinite number of people who desire each type of religious niche being offered, so there is now, because more religious groups can enter the market, increased competition between these groups to gain followers from their niche, and competition, in turn, gives members an elevated sense of commitment to their religion.

b) Furthermore, even if new competitors do not appear, because the number of people now willing to join smaller niches has grown, there will be an attempt by some of the existing groups to reach the new

some of the most influential African American Sunni leaders and groups joined a national Islamic organization that was primarily led by immigrant Muslims, the Federation of Islamic Associations of the United States and Canada (FIA),<sup>8</sup> which, after its establishment in 1952, became the first long-lasting national immigrant-led Islamic umbrella organization.<sup>9</sup> Representatives from the AOI, the AAUAA, **Sheikh Daoud Faisal's IMA**, and Nasir Ahmad's Philadelphia group (which was affiliated with the AAUAA, but also used other teachings) all were in attendance at the FIA's 1953 convention.<sup>10</sup> In 1954, most of the same organizations returned to that year's convention, during which the FIA created its constitution, a document that stated that group's aims should be to "learn, exercise and spread the ideas of Islam [...] [and that North American Muslims] should organize themselves into local associations to translate the above objectives with their communities."<sup>11</sup> Interest in uniting Muslim communities therefore continued to increase, and, despite some complaints that the FIA—at least its magazine—focused too much on Arab Muslims and not enough on black Muslims,<sup>12</sup> many of these groups remained affiliated with the FIA into the 1960s, when the organization reached its peak of over 2,000 members.<sup>13</sup> These groups were eventually joined by a few other African American-majority Islamic organizations, such as Detroit's Masjid al-Mu'mineen (see below) and Hameed Wahab Bey's Philadelphia-based Moorish American Islamic Society.<sup>14</sup>

8 The FIA was originally called the International Muslim Society, not to be confused with the Somali-led IMS in New York.

9 On the Federation, see Howell, *Old Islam*, 150–60 and Bowen, *HCTIUS*, 1:293–351.

10 "Moslem Unity Advanced," *New York Times*, July 5, 1953, 36; "Islam Crisis Discussed," *New York Times*, July 6, 1953, 3.

11 Al-Maqdissi, "The Muslims," 31.

12 Rasheed N. Ali, "My Complaint is This," *Muslim Star* 6, no. 14 (1966): 3, IMJC Papers, Box 8, BHL.

13 Report, 3/15/1961, Chicago, 1, FIA FBI file; "International Muslim Brotherhood in Philadelphia," *Muslim Star* 6, no. 14 (1966): 5, IMJC Papers, Box 8, BHL; "Philadelphia, Pa.," *Muslim Star* 6, no. 16 (1966): 4, IMJC Papers, Box 8, BHL; Yusuf Sadiq, "Philadelphia, PA.," *FIA Journal* 1, no. 2 (January–March 1965): 31, Aliya Hassen Papers, Box 1, F.I.A. Journals, 1965, BHL.

14 Howell, *Old Islam*, 201–08; Haitama Sharef, "Al-Mu'mineen Mosque Cooperates with MSA," *Muslim Star* 10, no. 45 (1969): 8, IMJC Papers, Box 8, BHL; "Attend Dinner, Send Donations," *Muslim Star* 11, no. 61 (1970): 3, IMJC Papers, Box 8, BHL; *Washington D.C. 1958, Seventh Annual Convention, The Federation of Islamic Associations in the United States and Canada* ([Washington, DC]: Federation of Islamic Associations in the United States and Canada, 1958), [24], BHL; *The Federation of Islamic Associations in the United States and Canada, nth Annual Convention, August 10th, nth, & 12th, 1962, Philadelphia, Penna.* ([Philadelphia]: Federation of Islamic Associations in the United States and Canada, 1962), [17], BHL;

Apparently inspired by the FIA's program, when the New York City attendees returned home after the 1954 convention they, along with the IMS and other New York Islamic organizations, started both a local Muslim Council to coordinate the public relations, social work, and missionary efforts of the city's various Islamic organizations as well as a campaign to build an Islamic center in Manhattan.<sup>15</sup> Besides having a relatively large concentration of Islamic organizations, one of the reasons for the success of New York City Islamic unity was that its AAIR groups retained the ties that they had developed in the 1940s. In 1950, the IMS, AOI, IMA, and al-Rawaf's YMMA, along with a few other groups, were members of New York's (apparently short-lived) Inter-Muslim Societies Committee, an organization that brought to speak at the IMS that year the Indian scholar Muhammad Abdul Aleem Siddiqui, who encouraged US Muslims "to unite and establish a powerful movement of enlightenment on Islam."<sup>16</sup> Also, throughout the decade **Sheikh Daoud Faisal** regularly appeared at the city's various African American mosques—it is even said that he studied at the AOI into the late 1950s—a habit that helped solidify a feeling of connection between the communities.<sup>17</sup>

**Sheikh Daoud**, meanwhile, seems to have been one of the most active Sunni AAIR leaders during this period, and he almost certainly was the one to receive the most press. Faisal began the decade with the 1950 publication of "*Al-Islam, the Religion of Humanity*,"<sup>18</sup> a nearly 200-page collection of a few dozen short essays on basic Islamic topics, including early Islamic history, the Islamic view of Jesus, and the proper practice of prayer. Being one of the first significant-sized Islamic books to be written by a US Muslim leader—and a black one at that—*Al-Islam* helped further establish Sheikh Daoud's reputation among immigrants and converts alike. His Islamic work, however, was not limited to writing. Faisal's mosque housed indigent Muslims, held daily prayers and fes-

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"F.I.A. Delegates at Washington Meeting Act in Harmony on Important Agenda," *Muslim Star* 6, no. 22 (April–May 1967): 1, IMJC Papers, Box 8, BHL.

15 Ibid.

16 "His Eminence, Siddiqui To Be Honored Sunday," *New York Amsterdam News*, August 12, 1950, 16; "Moslem Leader Honored at Dinner, Urges Unity," *New York Amsterdam News*, August 19, 1950, 13. Interestingly, in 1951 it was reported that the AAUAA had been aware of, and probably influenced by Siddiqui; see Special Correspondent, "Muslim Activities in Philadelphia."

17 "Moslems Observe Day of Sacrifice," *New York Times* September 1, 1952, 28; Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage*, 62.

18 Daoud Ahmed Faisal, "*Al-Islam, the Religion of Humanity* (Brooklyn: Islamic Mission of America, 1950).

tivals, proselytized to African Americans in prison,<sup>19</sup> and ensured that Muslim seamen had insurance and burial plots. Well-known for being a strong advocate of the anti-racist Islamic message promoted by Satti Majid, Faisal was very popular among African American Sunnis throughout the country, and he frequently traveled to Sunni mosques across the US, keeping the African American Sunni network alive.<sup>20</sup> During this period, he also was one of the early black Muslim advocates for developing ties with the United Nations, speaking in front of UN delegates in 1949 and serving as part of the Moroccan UN delegation in 1953.<sup>21</sup> Through these efforts Sheikh Daoud became one of the few Sunni leaders of African Americans to maintain a regular presence in newspapers, and, partly as a result, his IMA gained a small number of new black members; in the mid-to-late 1950s his following in Brooklyn came to around 300 Muslims.<sup>22</sup>

Another important example of the development of multi-ethnic Sunni ties during this period was the Detroit Sunni community centered around Ishmael Sammsan.<sup>23</sup> Information about Sammsan's life before arriving in Detroit is still incomplete; the available evidence shows only that he was born in Arkansas in 1894 and he was living in Detroit by the late 1930s, where he, like a few of the early MSTAs, started claiming to be a born-Muslim from Arabia and where he appears to have had some affiliation with the NOI or a related group, perhaps the Sunni-leaning DOO.<sup>24</sup> By 1948, however, Sammsan, who

19 Curtis, "Urban Muslims," 54.

20 McCloud says that the IMA was an umbrella organization "for many smaller Muslim communities that dotted the northeastern coastline. It has been estimated that over sixty thousand conversions took place in Shaykh Daoud's community in his lifetime," and that he had personally claimed to have converted 30,000 (McCloud, 22). However, in more than one newspaper article in the late 1950s (when Daoud's influence was probably nearing its peak), it was reported that only 300 people were members of the IMA (see Meyer Berger, "About New York," *New York Times*, January 9, 1956, 19; "Eyes to the East"). Nevertheless, in addition to numerous oral histories that claim that Faisal traveled to and was a major influence on mosques—including African American-majority Sunni mosques—throughout the country, there is some documentation from the time that confirms his wide influence; see "Negroes Most Popular Topic" and "Sheikh Stops in Hayward to Lecture."

21 A copy of his 1949 speech is contained at the end of *Al-Islam*, 173 ff. See also "Islam Crisis Discussed."

22 "About New York"; "Eyes to the East."

23 On Sammsan, see Howell, "Inventing," 239 ff. I am also grateful to Akil Fahd who provided me with additional data about Sammsan.

24 See his Social Security Death Index and his entry in the 1940 census, both available on

was traveling in Egypt at the time, had obtained a well-developed understanding of orthodox Islam and may have even taken the hajj pilgrimage.<sup>25</sup> After returning to the US in September of that year—and doing so in the accompaniment of one of Iowa’s prominent immigrant Muslim families, the Aosseys<sup>26</sup>—Sammsan went to Detroit where he organized both a group, the Universal Muslim Brotherhood of Al-Islam, and, in 1952, a mosque, called, initially, the Hajj Sammsan Abdullah Mosque (Islamic Mission) and, later, Al-Mu’mineen Mosque.<sup>27</sup> Sammsan’s main followers, unsurprisingly, were African American Sunnis, many of whom had been in the early NOI; but over the next few years a wide variety of immigrant Muslims began attending the mosque as well, and Sammsan became one of Detroit’s leading Muslim figures.<sup>28</sup> Despite his prominence, however, there was some membership fluctuation in the mosque due to the fact that at mid-decade the community lost a few Muslims to both the NOI and, apparently, emigration, when a family of fifteen black converts immigrated to Cairo.<sup>29</sup>

In general, throughout the US there was a growing sense of unity between African American and immigrant Sunni Muslims during the 1950s. Several AAIR groups, for example, were represented at the 1957 official opening and dedication of the Islamic Center in Washington, DC, which had been established by diplomats from Muslim-majority countries.<sup>30</sup> Out in Chicago, a number of black Ahmadis joined the Sunni mosque started by Jamil Diab, the NOI’s for-

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*Ancestry.com*, as well as Ismail Sammsan, “No Harm Intended,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 22, 1937, 14; Ray Davis, “Cassius Clay’s Challenge: A Muslim Answers—‘Look for the Truth,’” *Michigan Chronicle*, April 25, 1964, sect. A, page 5; Howell, “Inventing,” 239; Howell, *Old Islam*, 188; Sammsan, “No Harm.”

25 Dennis Walker, email correspondence with the author, September 10, 2011; Davis, “Cassius Clay’s.”

26 Passenger list for the Khedive Ismail, 28 September 1948, available at *Ancestry.com*.

27 Howell, *Old Islam*, 189.

28 In 1959, the FBI learned there were reportedly “hundreds of old [African American] Muslims in Detroit but they do not recognize Elijah as the leader and, therefore, refuse to follow him”; these were probably mostly followers of Sammsan. See Fard FBI file, Report, SA [name withheld] to SAC, Detroit, 11/6/1959, 3. Interestingly, some members left his group during the 1950s to join the NOI; see Madyun Abdulhaseeb, “The Qur’anic Basis for Islamic Unorthodoxy: The Application of the Rule of Necessity and Need, and Other Exceptions in the Nation of Islam” (MA thesis, California State University Dominguez Hills, 2003), 77–79, 163.

29 Abdulhaseeb, “Qur’anic Basis,” 75–81; “Miscellanea,” *Muslim World* 46 (1956): 183.

30 These included the IMA, the Moslem League of Philadelphia, Pittsburgh’s First Moslem Mosque, the IMS, and the Academy of Islam. Also in attendance were the YMAA and

mer Arabic teacher.<sup>31</sup> In Massachusetts, meanwhile, Ella Collins, Malcolm X's half sister, after a brief period as a member of the NOI, became a Sunni at the immigrant-majority mosque in Quincy,<sup>32</sup> and in 1958 Haj Abu Nuri, an African American who had converted to Islam in 1940 while serving in the army, organized the Harvard Islamic Society with a Pakistani named Syed Nadwi.<sup>33</sup> The main center of inter-ethnic Muslim activity, however, continued to be New York, which saw several African Americans join up with new immigrant-populated groups like the mixed African American-Somali community called Jama Diria and the organization known as African Drums, which was run by a Mr. Naim and Saudia Masoud, who encouraged Africans and Americans—both Muslims and non-Muslims—to study Islam and discuss political issues.<sup>34</sup> In addition, Dr. Mahmoud Youssef Shawarbi, the Egyptian scholar who had met members of the NOI in the 1950s and had served not only as a UN advisor, a member of the board of the DC Islamic Center, and a member of the Muslim Council in New York, but also as a leader of the FIA, made several personal connections with Sunni and Ahmadi African American Muslims, including the famous Ahmadi jazz pianist Ahmad Jamal, whom he helped convert to Sunni Islam.<sup>35</sup>

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the New York-based Moslem Brotherhood. Muhammad Abdul-Rauf, *History of the Islamic Center: From Dream to Reality* (Washington, DC: The Center, 1978), 72.

31 Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism*, 318–19.

32 Rodnell P. Collins with A. Peter Bailey, *Seventh Child: A Family Memoir of Malcolm X* (Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publishing Group, 1998), 153–54.

33 Mary Lahaj, “Building an Islamic Community in America: History of the Islamic Center of New England, 1931–1991,” Microsoft Word file, 2009, 20. Lahaj's wording is a little vague and seems to suggest that another person who helped found the group was Ahmed Osman, a Sudanese Muslim who in 1965 would speak at Malcolm X's funeral. However, we know Osman was attending Dartmouth in 1962, and presumably as an undergrad, so it seems unlikely that he had helped form the Harvard group. Lahaj may have meant to convey that Osman was later only a member of the group.

34 “Principal: Muslim Organizations in the New York Area,” Aliya Hassen Papers, Box 1, Malcolm X (Articles and Correspondence), 1959–1965, BHL. According to a 1958 newspaper article, the name of the last group was actually ‘Asian-African Drums,’ and its executive secretary (apparently Saudia Masoud) attended an NOI Unity Feast that year—all of which suggests an NOI influence; see “Mr. Muhammad Calls for ‘United Front of Black Men’ at New York City Rally,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 19, 1958, B2. As we will see in Chapter 8, this was not the only ‘African’ group in Harlem with a focus on drums and religion to which the NOI was connected.

35 I am assuming his affiliation with the Muslim Council based on his involvement with the Mosque Foundation that emerged from this Council. See Ferris, 219; Jay Walz, “Pianist-Investor is a Hit in Cairo,” *New York Times*, November 20, 1959, 14; “Federation of Islamic