

NATION OF ISLAM OVERVIEW

When one mentions "black Muslims," the likely reference is to the Nation of Islam. This group believes that Allah appeared in the person of Master Wallace Fard Muhammad in July of 1930. They consider him to be the long awaited "Messiah" of the Christians and the "Mahdi" of the Muslims. However, Master Wallace Fard Muhammad suddenly disappeared and never returned. The Nation of Islam continued and grew under the leadership of his messenger, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. It became successful and received much recognition, due in large part to Malcolm X. Yet, Malcolm X split from the group as he found the teaching of Elijah Muhammad to be false. He realized this during his trip to Mecca, where he learned of the true Islamic religion.

Following the death of Elijah Muhammad the Nation of Islam became fragmented. The leadership of Elijah's son was challenged as he sought to enter the Islamic mainstream. Hence, the religion was divided by different leaders. The most well known is the group headed by Louis Farrakhan. This group is still called the Nation of Islam, and its members uphold the teaching of Elijah Muhammad.

In his book, *Message to the Black Man in America*, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad offers the program and position of the Nation of Islam. The followers of Louis Farrakhan adhere to this program, circulated in print, which gives ten statements of what the Muslims want and twelve statements of what the Muslims believe. They call for freedom, justice, freedom of all believers held in prisons, an end to police brutality, separate schools, and ultimately a separate state or territory of their own. They believe that the Bible has been tampered with and must be reinterpreted so that humanity will not be snared by these falsehoods. They believe in the mental resurrection but not the physical resurrection of the dead. They believe that the offer of integration is hypocritical and a deception to keep them from having a separate state.

Elijah Muhammad also claimed that a scientist named Yacub created the devil white race by breeding lighter skinned blacks until they finally became white. The white man then tricked the black man and made him his slave.

In order to understand the history of the Nation of Islam and to learn about other black Muslim groups, a good place to start is *The Encyclopedia of American Religions, 3rd Edition*. It offers a brief historical sketch of each group and provides sources for further information. Other resources include *The Nation Speaks* newsletter, *The Final Call* newspaper, Elijah Muhammad's book *Message to the Black Man in America*, and taped speeches of Louis Farrakhan.

The Nation of Islam hopes to liberate the black people in America from social injustice, poverty, drug dependency, and immorality. They have, in fact, been highly successful in the fight against drugs. In some areas they have won the respect of gang members and are becoming a presence in black neighborhoods. Although they still have conflicts with the police, they are beginning to earn the respect of the police force. A good article to look at is "Doing the Right Thing," a one-page article in the April 16, 1990 issue of *Time* magazine.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. How do teens of any color relate to other teens who have a separatist mentality? Should white teens feel guilty when a young follower of the Nation of Islam explains how the white race has oppressed his people?
2. How should a teacher or youth leader react to a false claim of a young follower of the Nation of Islam? Perhaps one way would be to respectfully refute a false claim while referring to true examples in which black youth can be proud. There is a myriad of black people who have made and do make wonderful contributions to our society. Black Muslims need not distort history to be proud of their people. They just need to know their history.

IMPLICATIONS

1. Teachers, parents, social workers, and youth leaders need to be ready to refute some of the wild claims of the Nation of Islam while at the same time showing concern and a readiness to work against the injustices still perpetuated against the black community.
2. The people who go to Farrakhan rallies may not follow all his beliefs, but he is telling them things they want to hear. Black people are angry about their situation.
3. It is important for youth workers in the inner city to understand the feelings of the black Muslims. They clearly articulate these feelings; youth workers need to offer a response that can pierce misleading messages.

Paul Paris cCYS
