

# Finding W.D. Fard



# Finding W.D. Fard:

*Unveiling the Identity of the  
Founder of the Nation of Islam*

By

John Andrew Morrow

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To Ayah

“Allah has proved to be very much a human being.”

FBI (Nov. 1943)

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## ENDORSEMENTS

“An innovative and valuable book that makes a fundamental contribution to the history of Islam in America.”

—**Dr. Dennis Walker**, Author of *Islam and the Search for African-American Nationhood: Elijah Muhammad, Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam*, and Adjunct Researcher at Monash University, Australia

“The world’s religions are often centered upon a mystery; the Nation of Islam is no different. Whenever scholars investigate the “Black Muslims,” they are inevitably accompanied by the figure of W.D. Fard, who seems to linger in the background like an ever-present specter. In John Andrew Morrow’s book, *Finding W.D. Fard: Unveiling the Identity of the Founder of the Nation of Islam*, W.D. Fard finally comes to the foreground, as Morrow delivers a direct encounter with the mysterious man who was the founder of the black nationalist movement, which attracted figures such as Malcolm X and Louis Farrakhan.

Having analyzed all relevant documents, as well as their cacophony of interpretations, John Andrew Morrow’s book stands alone in its ability to shed light upon the historical unknown that has plagued many studies of the origins of the Nation of Islam. From Fard’s tangled racial make-up, to his theological and social doctrines, which Morrow demonstrates were influenced by a variety of religions, Morrow’s book systematically interrogates previous held ideas about W.D. Fard while delivering his own compelling composite of who this “deified” man really was. There is no doubt that this book will prove to be indispensable to all future attempts to understand the historical, social, and religious *geist* of W.D. Fard and the Nation of Islam.”  
—**Dustin J. Byrd**, Ph.D. Associate Professor of Philosophy, Religion, and Arabic, Olivet College, USA, and the co-editor of *Malcolm X: From Political Eschatology to Religious Revolutionary*

“Once again, John Andrew Morrow has provided insight into a topic that few scholars have tried to tackle -- the life and legacy of W.D. Fard. While few know his name, Fard is one of the most significant Muslims in U.S. history, and Morrow does an excellent job of tracking him and the emergence of the Nation of Islam. Following in the footsteps of his critically acclaimed *Covenants of the Prophet Muhammad with the Christians of the*

*World, Morrow* has provided another scholarly gem which is bound to be a quintessential reading on the life of W.D. Fard.”

—**Dr. Craig Considine**, Lecturer of Sociology at Rice University and author of *Muslims in America: Examining the Facts*

# FOREWORD

BY DENNIS WALKER

RESEARCHER ON THAILAND'S MUSLIMS  
AT MONASH ASIA INSTITUTE, AUSTRALIA

It has been an illuminating experience to scroll through John Andrew Morrow's book, *Finding W.D. Fard: Unveiling the Identity of the Founder of the Nation of Islam*. I have followed the development of Morrow's portrait of the founder of the "Black Muslim" movement over several years.

A part of Morrow at first felt strongly critical of Wali Fard Muhammad, whom he tended to see as a non-African-American human who in the 1930s misapplied his intelligence to separate from their meagre monies Negro / African American lumpens who in the latter years of the 1920s migrated from the rural South of the USA to a segregated urban slum in Detroit, Michigan. But Morrow's maturing vision has registered the long-term gains of social and economic self-improvement and dramatic upward mobility that Fard and his movement conferred upon uprooted black masses from the rural South who were disintegrating into unemployment and criminality in the great cities of the North, increasingly wracked by the Great Depression. A pure con-man would have formulated Islam in a way that fitted better into the needs and convenience of the white Anglo-Saxons who ruled America. While he did vent real hatred in his non-stop denunciation of whites as "devils" whom Almighty Allah, God, would not long spare, and his followers adopted an insouciant stance to the White police, Fard stopped short (some-times just barely) of preparing them for armed military insurrection, and generally preferred his converts to improve their economic conditions by making themselves bourgeois.

Wali Fard Muhammad has been weighed by Morrow as a man of Muslim origin who did indeed come from "the East," somewhere. Morrow tested both moderate and radical roles attributed to W.D. Fard. Beynon had reported in 1938 that the Nation of Islam was divided into various factions: "one branch of the movement, led by 'Abdul Mohammed, maintained that Fard was a prophet, and another, headed by Elijah Muhammad, believed that he was Allah." According to the teachings of the Lost-Found Nation of Islam as enunciated by Elijah Muhammad, W.D. Fard "was the son of a jet-

black man, the Hidden Imam, and a platinum-blond Armenian woman, the devil” (Goldman 36).

While some scholars, including myself in 2005, have argued that the belief in the Hidden Imam in the teachings of Fard belongs to Isma‘ilism or Druzism, Morrow ascribes it more (but not exclusively so) to the belief in the Hidden Imam in the mainstream of Shiism, the Imamiyyah Ithna-‘Ashariyyah (Twelver) Shiites. The Isma‘ili, who are divided into two major branches, do not all believe in a Hidden Imam. The Druze do not believe in any current Hidden Imam in the sense understood by Shiism with its Imamology. One Druze group did indeed hold that the Isma‘ili Caliph al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (985-1021 CE) had gone into occultation. However, they also believe him to be divine [which was already said by some about Wali Fard Muhammad even when he was still active in Michigan between 1930 and 1935]. “Walker generalized,” explains Morrow, “when he writes that ‘[t]he classical Sevens Shiites or Isma‘ilis, the Twelver Shiites, and the Druze... all developed doctrines that there is an Imam who never died but only vanished or occulted: he will one day return to destroy oppressive governments and inaugurate a golden age on earth.’” Dr. Morrow points out that “this was the case with some, but not all, branches of esoteric Shiite thought.”

Morrow in one place argues that Wali Fard Muhammad was a sort of colored Imam who accorded with a long-held minority position within Twelver Shiism: “Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi, the Twelfth Imam of the Shiites, was the son of Hasan al-Askari, the son of an Arab father and a Berber mother, and Narjis, a white European Christian woman. Said to be a direct descendant of Simon Peter, the apostle of Jesus, she was thus of Jewish extraction.” For Morrow, this fits the profile of the mother of W.D. Fard, whom he once characterized as a patrician-blooded Russian Jew. In a series of clutchings at the historical two parents of Wali Fard Muhammad, Louis Farrakhan, however, on one or more occasions defined that mother as actually a white Muslim from Chechnya.

While most Shiite scholars hold that Narjis was a white woman, notes Morrow, a minority believes that she was, in reality, a black African slave. This idea of a mixed-blooded savior or messianic figure is not found among the Sunnis, the Ahmadiyyah, the Sevens or the Druze -- only in works with some links to Twelver Shiites. It does not seem very likely to Morrow that W.D. Fard learned this view of Imam Mahdi as being part black from the mostly illiterate Arab Shiites in the U.S. at the time. “Not surprisingly, the Shiite Muslims who defend the theory that the mother of Imam Mahdi was black are people from the Indian subcontinent and black Shiites from the Americas who, despite embracing actual Shiism, remain stubbornly

attached to some of the teachings of W.D. Fard, the black nationalists, and Afro-centrists.” For Morrow, the fact that W.D. Fard asserted that Imam Mahdi was black might suggest that he himself was a person of color, perhaps of mixed East Indian and British ancestry. Although he taught “knowledge of self,” W.D. Fard may simultaneously have suffered from “hatred of self,” if his father were one of the British who attacked Afghanistan. The notion of a divine lineage of Imams, with the transfer of manifested divinity from father to son upon the former’s death, is an adjunct of both Imamiyyah and the Sevenser Isma‘iliyyah, and furthermore, is expressed by the NOI’s idea of a divine lineage of Scientists or Imams.

For Morrow, since W.D. Fard spoke clearly of Twelve Imams, his doctrine resembles Twelver and Ghulat [Extremist] Shiism and not the Sevenser Shiism stressed by Gardell (and by myself, Dennis Walker, in 2005). “The number twelve is central to the Nusayris (Alawites) of Syria [the sect of Presidents Hafiz al-Asad and Bashar al-Asad]: twelve imams, twelve naqibs, twelve apostles of Jesus, twelve captains of Israel.” Were Fard centrally influenced by Isma‘ilism, believes Morrow, a specific focus on the symbolism of seven Imams would have been expected. As Morrow points out, the Syrian Alawites “have traditionally deified Imam ‘Ali but ... now claim to have become mainstream Twelver Muslims.”

At one point, Morrow goes some way in normalizing Fard down into a more ordinary Muslim (albeit Shiite) leader. In 1952, there were still hundreds of old Muslims in Detroit, people who studied under W.D. Fard, who refused to recognize Elijah Muhammad as a leader, much less as the Prophet or Messenger of Allah (FBI file 440). Morrow follows Clifton E. Marsh that the Black Muslim movement had two branches, one led by ‘Abdul Mohammed, which maintained that Fard was a prophet -- and another, headed by Elijah Muhammad, which harbored the tenet that he was Allah incarnate: that had set disciple Elijah free to claim to be the Prophet of Allah. Even in the Elijah circle, though, the tenet that Fard was God was muted and confidential for some years.

Morrow points out, though, that it is difficult to defend those who believe that W.D. Fard was deified by Elijah Muhammad after he disappeared, once one examines documents dating back to 1932. Fard, at Police Headquarters in Detroit, revealed to the devil authorities, without any apparent coercion of any kind, that he was the Deity.

One positive evaluation Morrow mentions is that with his exotic appearance and background, his vast knowledge, his mastery of many languages, his stylish attire, and his compassion towards the poor and disenfranchised,

W.D. Fard created, not only a community, but a nation: the Nation of Islam, which, in years to come, would count tens of thousands of citizens or members. With unparalleled leadership, managerial, and financial skills, he opened and managed a temple, schools for adults, which focused on literacy, management, health and hygiene, child-rearing and interpersonal relations, as well as a separate school system for African American children where they would be provided with a positive and culturally-affirming environment.

By the time he disappeared, reflects Morrow, Master Fard had truly created a nation within a nation: the Nation of Islam, with a strong political structure and economic foundation which reached considerable heights under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad from 1950-1975, so that it formed an inspiration for many until it was torn down by Warith Deen Mohammed.

On the side of a negative evaluation, Morrow cites a newspaper article from 1932 which observed that “Detroit Negroes... were being organized as Mohammedans by a man who told them they were of Turkish origin and charged them fees for their ‘Turkish’ names.” If Fard was not in it for the money, why was he charging poverty-stricken African Americans ten dollars to give them a Muslim name?

If W.D. Fard was a Muslim immigrant with religious and perhaps ethnic and linguistic ties to the East, particularly to what is now Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, this might explain why he described himself and his followers as Asiatics (in the Middle East “al-Sharqiyyun” as against “the Westerners”). He never said that they were Africans or that they should return to Africa. He never said that they were Moors who should return to Morocco. He stated that they were Asiatics who needed to return to Asia. This, to Morrow, suggests that W.D. Fard identified with Asia.

Had W.D. Fard been an African American or an Anglo American, he would have been held by police authorities. If he was turned over to immigration, it was because they knew or believed that he was indeed a foreigner, argues Morrow. By this time, however, Fard or Farrad had been in the country for three decades. “Surely, he should have been naturalized at this point,” observes Morrow, “unless he deliberately chose to maintain a clandestine and separatist lifestyle.”

Although he only intimated to his closest followers that he was Divine, Morrow confirms that Fard revealed that he was the Deity to the white devils at Detroit Police Headquarters. Morrow has thus definitively established that it was Wali Fard Muhammad who presented himself as God-in-Person in Detroit in the earliest 1930s. Elijah Muhammad thus later merely developed Wali Fard Muhammad’s earliest (if confidential) presentation of himself.

Concentrated upon the figure of Professor Wallace Delany Ford or Wali Fard Muhammad, Morrow's book amounts to a vanguard assessment of the impact of Third World Islam and Muslims upon America and Americans. I hope that after this work is published, he will widen his treatment of African-Americans who responded to that message from the East, among whom he has already examined Elijah Muhammad, and then the latter's son Warith ud-Din Muhammad and Louis Farrakhan to rather lesser extents.

I have already been examining the responses to Fard by Ishmael Sammsan (SSN: 362-12-0277). Born in Walnut Lake Ark, Arkansas, on the first of May of 1894, this African American laborer joined Fard's sect in the early 1930s after having been earlier exposed to a crypto-Islamic cult in late childhood/early adolescence, to the Moorish Science Temple of Noble Drew 'Ali, to Islamic elements in the black nationalist movement of Marcus Garvey, and possibly to (a somewhat folklorish?) Islam among Arab migrants in Detroit after he moved there in 1917.

From the 1920s onwards, and in large part as a result of the curiosity aroused by Fard about what was Islam, the Arab countries were visited by African-Americans who had joined, or listened to, new Muslim sects in America. Arabic materials about their visits are a source for some untapped primary data that has not survived in English itself about the feelings and some of the goals of African-Americans who entered Islam from 1900 to 1950. Secondly, the documents in Arabic will also help historians to gauge the reactions of the Arab side, and thus up to a point measure how far Islam as understood by Arabs, and implemented by them, really could construct an integrative Islamic community able to span continents and span also nationalities delimited by diverse languages.

For some scholars based in the West, converts to Islam evolve novel and sometimes unique interpretations and applications of it to achieve their special needs and interests. We find partial, but valuable, evidence on these issues in an article titled "Islam in America" ("al-Islamu fi Amrikah") serialized by Cairo's pan-Arab newspaper the *Minbar al-Sharq* (*Tribune of the East*), in 1948. This newspaper was a forum for advocates of both pan-Arab and pan-Islamic unity. The serialized article, seldom paralleled in length for that newspaper on any subject, was an edited text of the editor's interviews with Ishmael Sammsan, a one-time follower of Wali Fard Muhammad ("Professor Ford") who had founded the Black Muslims in 1930 in Detroit -- which by then had become Samson's home town. The interview(s), and Samson's provision of notes, were conducted in the wake of his completion of a pilgrimage to Mecca: he had then come to Cairo hoping to study the Muslim faith at Islam's ancient al-Azhar University.



Samson had wanted to equip himself with “the treasures” (*dhakha'ir*) of Arabic and Islam so that he could on his return to his country, the United States, spread the light of Islam among those of his brothers who had already converted to it but were not yet grounded enough in it, and preach Islam to those who were still unreached. He stressed that he had desired only the reward of the Hereafter through study in Egypt. The venture of Samson beyond doubt manifested unusual courage, capacity, and initiative. After all, he had been denied entry into Canada on September 27, 1935, after attempting to visit a friend by the name of Mr. Turner who resided in Windsor, Ontario. However, defects of Sammsan in his preparations before departure, Cairene red tape, and the narrow outlook and the lack of vision of al-Azhar institutions and government bodies in monarchical Egypt laid many stumbling-blocks before his achieving things in Egypt for which he had hoped.

While Sammsan’s visit to Egypt cost him a lot as a straightened blue-collar American black for the ticket, it did win him an in-depth serialized coverage of neo-Muslim Afro-Americans in the Egyptian media -- and from a newspaper widely read in Arab West Asia to boot. The irony here is that the institutions of Egypt had for the time failed to teach Islam or Arabic to Sammsan, while Sammsan succeeded in educating Egyptians and Arabs about his group of faraway Muslims in another continent still exotic and unfamiliar for Middle Easterners in comparison to France or Britain.

The lengthy article presented Haj Sammsan’s conceptualizations of Islam, and his detailed memories of the evolution of Islam among blacks in America in the era of the first half of the twentieth century. His observations pointed to some possibilities for the Arabs, black Africa and black America to build a compound triangular relationship crossing continents that would pivot around Islam. It seems that the editors of *Minbar al-Sharq* acutely grasped the future political importance of this early growth of Islam in the most powerful country in the world, America. They also felt solidarity with American blacks as they faced racist oppression and violence from what *Minbar al-Sharq* was coming to define as a shared Anglo-American imperialist enemy. *Minbar al-Sharq* processed the article with painstaking care so that it would bring all those issues home to its Arab readers in their full, sharp detail.

The lengthy serialized article on Ishmael Sammsan and black American Muslims was printed in the context of a growing feeling among Arabs that the United States under President Harry Truman (r. 1945-1953) was striving to aid the birth of the State of Israel “and grab [Palestine] from its owners the Arabs.” *Minbar al-Sharq* noted in an article in the number of March 26, 1948 that the U.S. government had worked to pass a resolution at the United

Nations to partition Palestine by “purchasing the consciences of the delegates.” “O American Embassy in Egypt: will you not transmit to President Truman that his country has become, because of his policy, the most hated among lands for the Arabs?” [Habib Jamati, “A Failed U.S. Attempt” (“Muhawalaha Amrikiyyah Fashilah”) *Minbar al-Sharq*, March 26, 1948 p. 1]. However, in *Minbar al-Sharq*'s copious representation of his views, Sammsan at no point mentioned either American Jews, or nascent Israel: the pre-1975 NOI did not so often see “oppressive” local whites who were Jews as such, although some items on (faraway) Nasser (r. 1956-1970) and Palestine/Israel did appear in their tabloids.

Some of recent hajj pilgrim Ishmael Sammsan's new vision of Islam in his 1948 interviews with *Minbar al-Sharq* was of an Islamization of the individual that comes through cumulative contact with several movements that have some aspects of Islam to them. The impact of one movement or one individual advocate alone is not enough to convince some individuals that an Islam in which he or she was not born is true. Ishmael Sammsan's exposure to the teachings of Islam began in his childhood, when he was still more a boy than an adolescent. “In 1909, there came to us a man named Dr. Carter who founded a secret society. I learned a year after its founding that it used to advocate Islam.” The Hill-Billies, white fanatics living in the mountains in the USA's southern states, intimidated Dr. Carter into fleeing to “some unknown land: we did not hear anything about him after that.”

In the narrative of Ishmael Sammsan, then, the secretive movement of “Carter” was the first time he heard the name of Islam, in late childhood or early adolescence. The second time in which he encountered a sort of Islamist movement took place in Detroit after he migrated there in 1917. Sally Howell's claim that “Imam Ismail Sammsan (1894-1970) came to Detroit in the late 1940s” (188) is therefore incorrect. The same can be said of Patrick D. Bowen's claim that “[i]nformation 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” (vol. 2, 459). The testimony of Imam Sammsan himself, documented in detail in an Arabic-language article, provides a plethora of vital information. Although he came from the South, he had been living in Detroit since 1917. As Ishmael Sammsan explains, in the year 1918

there came to Detroit a man named Mr. [Marcus] Garvey. He used to stand as a street preacher calling for the true religion of God, albeit in a non-direct way, and many black men and women responded to his call. When the car company learned of that, it dismissed from its service all who followed Mr. Garvey, telling them to go to him and get a job there.

Garvey's (1887-1940) was a movement of a black nationalism fully in the public sphere, as against the crypto-Islam of "Carter:" it openly spread awareness about Africa, but according to Ishmael also spread elements of Islam among the black masses in Detroit. While Sammsan did not mention the name, we know that the Sudanese Dusé Mohamed 'Ali (1866-1945) was a key adviser to Garvey from the beginning and also among the important journalists of the movement's newspaper *Negro World*.

Garvey's was a movement that channeled diverse elements and images about Islam and Muslims in Africa and Asia to the masses of blacks in Detroit, but in combination with others about non-Muslim Africans, others of a Christianity about which U.S. blacks increasingly had mixed feelings, and many images of Anglo-Saxon life and ideology towards which U.S. blacks felt positive as well as hostile feelings.

Then Ishmael Sammsan encountered in Detroit a local branch of the "Moorish" movement of the Noble Drew 'Ali (1886-1929). Ishmael's description of this movement to the people of Egypt and the Arab world was precise and exact: he hinted that Drew mixed non-Islamic elements with the correct teachings of Islam that he conveyed to the masses of blacks.

Before Ishmael Sammsan seriously entered into Islam he had needed cumulative contact with four or five movements or sects -- perhaps more -- that conveyed emancipatory interpretations of elements of Islam to blacks, along with much content from many domestic U.S. issues and concepts. The process of converting to Islam in America can be less a matter of sudden exposure to one set of communications from one source, followed by a blinding light and conversion, than a chain of exposures to a succession of Black groups that evoke Islam to some extent, and often also to milieus with Middle Eastern culture elements (heavily Arab Detroit was the place in America in which those could stain blacks most), that all accumulate in an African-American's psyche until the critical mass for a lasting conversion is reached. Sammsan's conversations with Islamo-Arab Muslims in Cairo, despite his possibly put-on naiveté, would have to be looked at in a quite different way had he previously had in-depth interaction with Arabs in Detroit itself.

Ishmael Sammsan considered the sect of Fard the most serious of the Islamic movements for him and the masses of blacks:

In the year 1930, there appeared in Detroit the real [sic] Muslim, whose name was W.D. Fard: he had come from the Arabian Peninsula. This Religion began to attract people to him, praise be to Allah. Over three years, fifty thousand in the city of Detroit embraced Islam by his hand, and I -- yes, I -- was one of those Muslims.

A former member of the Moorish Science Temple of America, Ishmael Sammsan states that he was brought into Islam by W.D. Fard after he appeared in Detroit. This strongly suggests that W.D. Fard's Allah Temple of Islam was not a sect of the MSTA. As strange as it may seem, it would appear that its primary appeal was its claim to greater Islamic authenticity and orthodoxy. In fact, the new hajj Ishmael Sammsan in 1948 considered the Nation of Islam sect of Fard the purest of the Islamic movements among blacks in all the United States that had arisen thus far. But the purity of Islamic content was a relative issue in this context of America with its unusual ethnic antagonisms and structure, and its distinctive hybrid-Islamic spin-offs from the Christianity of Europe and its tenets.

In many cases, a complex of elements and diverse encounters have to apply joint or cumulative pressure at a single point, or in a succession of points, before a by then seriously alienated African-American can make that final jump from the Christianity of his parents to Islam. Sammsan did not just encounter five black nationalist movements that bore some elements of Islam, but also was influenced by discussion of Islam among blacks within other novel institutions run by whites themselves: the coming neo-Islam was not formed only in the black movements. After Ishmael Sammsan migrated to Detroit in 1917, "I got a job with the manufacturer of cars. There, I heard people talking about Islam although I did not understand what was being said."

The Ford Motor Company for the mass-manufacture of cars and vehicles employed some Arab immigrants and their offspring side by side with black workers, although Sammsan did not state that. The Ford plants were a critical framework for the acquisition by blacks who had recently been small farmers in the South before they left, of blue-collar working-class skills that enabled them to rise up into the level of the stratum of the urban labor aristocracy. That in turn provided the bases and optimism for them to rise further up into the ranks of the business-founding black middle-class. The Black Muslims under the leadership of Wali Fard Muhammad became aware of all the possibilities and discipline for further social ascent that the Ford factories, with the collectivism of its production lines, offered: hence they cooperated with management in the use of black workers to break strikes by white trade unionists.

When Verlen McQueen, who was renamed Verlen 'Ali by W.D. Fard in 1933, was arrested for attempting to sacrifice his wife and daughter to Allah in 1937, Ishmael Sammsan felt obliged to respond. In a letter directed to the editor of the *Pittsburg Courier*, which was published on May 22, 1937, Sammsan described himself as "a born Moslem" (14) when, in fact, he was a convert. As he explained,

The editorial of *The Courier* on April 3 shows a slanderous statement in relation to Islam religion of which I am a born member. A Detroit cultist is arrested in his home while heating a pot of water in which he had threatened to boil his wife and their 11-year-old daughter as a sacrifice to Allah. This is a slanderous statement aimed at the nation of Islam. Moslems do not sacrifice their brothers or sisters. We serve the one true God and that is Allah. Moslems are righteous people and will not kill unless forced to do so. (14)

This letter to the editor is important for various reasons. To commence with, both its author, Ishmael Sammsan, and its subject of criticism, Verlen 'Ali, were converted and reborn at the hand of W.D. Fard. Sammsan, however, is adamant in describing Verlen 'Ali as a cultist and insists on defending "the nation of Islam." Although Elijah Muhammad distanced himself from Verlen 'Ali, the latter felt compelled to kill his family as a result of the former's decree. After all, Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Temple People, stated that he would excommunicate all followers who failed to convert their family members. Verlen 'Ali was invariably a member of Elijah Muhammad's faction of the Nation of Islam. If Sammsan was defending the dignity of the Nation of Islam, he therefore belonged to another, more orthodox, branch of the movement, leading some to believe that W.D. Fard taught different versions of Islam to different disciples.

Sammsan's article was ignorant of, or concealed from the Arabs, most of the special doctrines remote from orthodox Islam that Fard had diffused, including his assumption that a direct inspiration was enabling him to provide a wealth of seemingly new myths about history, tenets, and religion. Sammsan's article in *Minbar al-Sharq* instead depicted Fard as in his conflicts with the white authorities just a commonplace *muballigh* ("conveyer") of the Qur'anic call *à la* Sunni Islam. When the police, following his arrest, interrogated him from whom he derived his authority to direct blacks to Islam, Fard replied that "I draw my power and authority from the Qur'an, which you see me now raise high in my right hand over my head. My second final authority is God, the Lord of the Worlds!" But Fard was to hint at a special closeness to God to an inner circle of blacks, which was then stated after his disappearance by his successor Elijah Muhammad. This expansive sense of self was to make Elijah depict himself after the Second World War as the "Messenger" of God (ie. a communicator of information from "God" = Fard): "orthodox Eastern Muslims" in the United States would in the nineteen fifties and sixties denounce that expansive vision of selfhood of the two leaders of the Nation of Islam as a violation of the doctrine that prophecy ended with Muhammad the son of 'Abd Allah in Arabia in the seventh century. However, the hajj Ishmael in

1948 did not declare to the Arabs any doctrine that Fard was an incarnation of God, which had come up in the chatter of some of his followers following his final exit from unfriendly Detroit, one fulcrum-point of Morrow's book.

Sharp images that Black Muslim Ishmael Sammsan offered of scenes of violent clashes between his NOI group and white Americans had to resonate among Arabs angry that the USA was shaping up as a patron and protector of Israel in their region. Sammsan narrated that

on April 27, 1934, the police stormed our club and our leader [Fard] was arrested and taken to the police headquarters. However, three hundred Muslim men, women and children, followed him to the station where a pitched battle started. It surprised that this very small group of Muslims gave such a tough account of themselves to the policemen, numbering 180, who were protecting the station. The battle ended in twelve minutes. They directed the dirtiest types of insults against the Muslims and imprisoned many after it emerged that two police officers had been seriously injured. [For the white American account of this clash see *Detroit Free Press* 18 and 19 April 1934, summarized Paul L. Williams, *Crescent Moon Rising: the Islamic Transformation of America* (NY: Prometheus Books 2013) pp. 67, 286].

Traditionally, in the South of the United States -- the region of origin of most who joined Fard's movement in the cities of the North -- whites were exercising great social authority over most blacks. They skillfully mustered all the instruments of their power and all its symbols with psychological precision to make and keep them as their broken-down servants. They made "the Negroes" think a hundred times about dire consequences whenever they might want to state their wishes and needs before "the whites."

The followers' psychological self-confidence before Euro-American culture that their imagined Islamic history nourished in their hearts, their lack of fear that the followers of Wali Fard Muhammad displayed of any violence from whites -- these unprecedented dimensions in the members spread fear of them among Michigan's Euro-Americans. The Muslims had reversed the traditional relative positions of the two "nations," relished Ishmael.

Ishmael Sammsan did not in Cairo, at least in this lengthy printed Arabic text, apply the word "devils" to the whites, which Wali Fard Muhammad had termed them. Ishmael did not to the Arabs either (a) mention Elijah Muhammad, and thus is unlikely to have been of the faction of that intimate associate of Fard after the break-up of the movement in the wake of Fard's 1935 exit from Detroit, nor (b) apply the word "devils" to whites. That strong leadership was lacking in the Black Muslim movement in the tradition of Wali Fard Muhammad, in the lead-up to, and for a time

after, World War II, set Ishmael Sammsan and others free to think independently in novel ways as individuals, especially if they left America to Muslim countries.

Black Muslim thinkers in the movements that Wali Fard Muhammad founded always have had a precise understanding of the machinery and means of the power and authority of whites in America and around the globe. But the general frame of the ideology of the sect was for the believers to await intervention by God, His execution of the white devils. In contrast, al-Hajj Ishmael Sammsan monitored the global institutions of the whites with a sharpness that can impel those who think like him to help organize counter-institutions in contemporary history to disable the white institutions and their functions. International evangelism, in particular, held out chances to build joint counter-institutions with Arab Muslims in the East for that purpose.

Ishmael Sammsan through the *Minbar al-Sharq* met Arab nationalists who hated missionary activities as one means in a battery that the Americans mustered to spread their “materialist” imperialism around the world. The veteran pan-Islamist poet ‘Ali al-Ghayyati wrote in an editorial that

the United States, sometimes under the guise of bringing commercial life, and sometimes under the guise of education, aims solely to spread its influence [in the East], and to win a foothold in this country [Egypt] to make it a colony where it can propagate its materialist spirit through money, or even through proselytizing. America has never even for one day been a true friend of Egypt but was always on the side of British colonialism.

Al-Ghayyati turned the minds of Egyptians back to the insults of the first President Roosevelt when he visited Cairo in 1910: “America in the era of Truman is the same America that the East has known as it has known Britain: the two are exactly the same with some difference in means but agreement in aims” [al-Ghayyati, “Amrikah wa al-Sharq” (“America and the East”), *Minbar al-Sharq* May 7, 1948: 1].

Black Muslims have seen Christianity as a tool of whites to make blacks submissive. Sammsan added a new dimension to Black Muslim hatred of black clergymen when, narrating the efforts by the white authorities in Detroit to end Fard’s sect, he portrays the black Christian clergymen there as an independent force that out of self-interest moved on their own initiative to push the whites to crush the Muslims -- that Black Christian clerics were in a way the source of the ordeal of the Nation of Islam in Detroit to late 1934. In Sammsan’s view, the black clerics were not an inert weapon in the hands of whites, but those who set off the campaign. Sammsan imagined that the leaflets of Wali Fard Muhammad over the years had

caused many [black] Christians to embrace Islam, which panicked the men of the church who then pressed the authorities who duly ordered the police to investigate the situation and if necessary eliminate Islam as a religion alien to America... The police stormed our club and took Professor Fard to police headquarters.

The black pastors who used to condemn Fard's Islam in 1932 on the grounds that it was "a new paganism" that the authorities had to crush in Detroit, did indeed do so as the authentic leaders of the black churches, as was to be documented decades later by the researches of Evanzz in 1999. See, for example, the data of Karl Evanzz cited in *The Messsenger: The Rise and Fall of Elijah Muhammad* (98). The memory of Ishmael Sammsan in 1948, after 14 years, was that "the police department was gathering information about the Muslims from the black Christians" before what it hoped would be its decisive wave of attacks on the cult in 1934.

Fard already spread liking for resurgent, albeit fascist, Japan: his disciple Elijah and his colleagues paid with prison terms for that. But Black Muslim leaders had focused Islam as the ideology that would firm up opposition to local enemy whites in the USA. The more globalist Sammsan in 1948 to the Arabs depicted U.S. whites as one component in a wide international white community extending itself across continents under the guise or instrument of Christianity:

The European man does not like to see the blacks become Muslims, because he knows that Islam is the religion of Nature and has the all-irradiating Light to regulate it. So, he sends his missionaries to the ends of the globe and aids them as he fires Christianity off as arrows he targets at their [the blacks'] minds. Thereby he interposes himself between them and the dignity and strength that the faith of the True Belief offers, making it easy for him to reduce them to slave laborers.

The multi-millionaires are sending missionaries to Africa, providing them with all means of force and duress to exploit those black people under the guise of Christianity, the religion that prompts them to surrender absolutely to the will of the whites, as it misrepresents that all the humiliation and degradations that they will now suffer in this world will be rewarded to them in the Abode of the Hereafter after death.

This formulation by the Hajj Ishmael Sammsan in 1948 was one distinguished internationalization of his old sect's non-stop linking of Christianity's turn-the-check theme to functions the Muslims claimed it had in white domination and exploitation of blacks in the USA's parochial domestic environment.



Criticisms by black Muslims of the institutions and technologies of whites always harbored a sharply-focused respect for their skills as techniques. The hajj Ishmael Sammsan:

I have always admired [U.S.] millionaires' preparedness to spend huge amounts of money to aid the white Christian missionaries stationed in the jungles and scrub-lands of Africa. They call the blacks to Christianity while not allowing any of those wretched blacks to sit with them at a meal-table or to enter the homes they enter, to carry out the "precious" Christianity they bestowed upon them.

Al-Azhar in Egypt's late monarchical period was sending its initial delegations to ascertain the conditions of Muslims in Nigeria, Senegal, and East Africa, but it was President Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser who, from around 1955, sent Azhar teachers, bale-loads of Arabic books and translations into African languages. Nasser promoted pan-Arabism, pan-Africanism, pan-Islamism, and cooperative solidarity with Third World countries. But the Egypt to which Sammsan had come for aid in 1948 was a poor country.

Overall, Sammsan in Egypt was striding at a fast pace away from the myths of his NOI sect that as far as macro-history went only waited for God through his Last Day to annihilate all whites in the world. He now sought an Islam that in secular life, including globally, would conduct programs to change reality incrementally through precise work, without sitting back just waiting for the intervention of God.

Hajj Ishmael wanted both to come into an emerging new Egypt, and to bring al-Azhar to his sector of black America, and unite the two places, bridging the intellectually broad ocean that separates them:

I learned that Al-Azhar sends envoys to many parts of the world, but that Muslims in America received no portion from this care. And Muslims in the United States are ignorant of their religion: they are most in need of personnel to guide them and educate them in the culture of Islam and to give them wide aid in establishing Islamic rituals and the establishment of mosques. [Interviews and scripts of al-Hajj Isma'il Samsun, "al-Islam fi Amrika" ("Islam in America"), *Minbar al-Sharq* June 18, 1948: 3; July 2, 1948: 2; July 9, 1948: 3; and July 23, 1948].

Dr. John Andrew Morrow, the author of this book, has unearthed a wide range of data about Sammsan's career as a Muslim leader in the USA upon his return to the USA from Egypt in 1948. Failing to find support for fledgling African American Muslim communities in the United States from Arabs and Africans, Ishmael Sammsan returned to America empty-handed. The 54-year-old Sammsan left Alexandria, Egypt, aboard the Khedive

Ismail, and arrived in New York on September 28, 1948. He may have returned to Egypt a second time for, a man listed as Ismael Samsen, who claimed to be a 50-year old Egyptian, arrived in Tacoma, Washington, in May of 1940, aboard the Aurora. He had departed from Kobe, Japan, via Granite and Miike, Japan. This was the year before Japan entered into World War II. Ishmael Sammsan spent the rest of his life in greater Detroit region where he met considerable success. As Patrick D. Bowen explains,

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 -- 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. 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. Despite his prominence, however, there was some 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. (vol. 2, 460)

As Bowen has noted, the FBI reported in 1959 that there were hundreds of old African American Muslims who refused to recognize Elijah Muhammad as their leader (vol. 2, 460). He seems correct to conclude that "these were probably mostly the followers of Sammsan" (vol. 2, 460). It would also be safe to assume that most of them had been introduced to Islam by W.D. Fard. Rather than follow Elijah Muhammad, they opted to follow Imam Sammsan. Although the Islam that Sammsan promoted was far more orthodox than the one preached by Elijah Muhammad, its Fardian influences were unmistakable. In fact, in a tract he disseminated shortly after returning from Egypt in 1948, he described himself as: "Hajj Ismail Sammsan, American citizen, ancestral or lineage, 'Arab,' from the 'Tribe of Shabazz,' birthed in the State of Arkansas, May the 1<sup>st</sup>, 1894" (Howell 188). Over time, however, he would gradually cast off the racial component of Fard's teachings. Writing to the *Afro-American* on October 3, 1959, Sammsan stressed that Islam was a universal religion and not a cult:

Islam is the religion for the whole of humanity and I believe it would be imperative that the West become a little better acquainted with it.

I notice that Islam is called a cult. This is an error and could be considered an insult to the Muslim world. The term should be eliminated by all newspapers.

Islam is not a cult. It is a religion given to the whole of humanity by Allah, the ruler and sustainer of all of the world.

Every true Muslim bows down and prostrate himself before his maker, who is Allah. (4)

Hajj Sammsan's accomplishments are illustrated in detail by Sally Howell in *Old Islam in Detroit* (188-193). He diligently promoted a serious study of Islam (189-190). He strongly emphasized social events and mutual aid (190). The largely African American members of the congregation were committed to transforming themselves personally and linking themselves with the global community of Islam (190). Over time, however, Ishmael Sammsan, became increasingly eager to disassociate his movement from the Nation of Islam. Although originally a disciple of W.D. Fard, Imam Sammsan eventually created an American mosque for all Muslims, regardless of race. However, this diverse, international, network of believers, did not last long. As Howell diagnosed,

Al-Mu'mineen's policy of openness came at a price. While its educational programs were overseen by Imam Sammsan himself in the 1950s, and by other converts or Mike Karoub in the 1960s, these classes became increasingly hierarchical and culturally biased as foreign-born Muslims (international students, missionaries, and newly arrived imams) asserted their authority over the convert population... [T]he domineering style of devout immigrants could be frustrating. Among those who felt most alienated by this was Imam Sammsan himself, who left the mosque in 1964 and founded an alternative congregation. (193)

Hajj Sammsan founded the Universal Consolidation of Islam at 5683 Maybury Grand, Detroit, MI 48208, in 1964. He included the following statement of purpose in its articles of incorporation:

To promote the Religion of Al-Islam in its entirety, as expounded in the Holy Qur'an, and illustrated by the Holy Prophet Muhammad over 1300 years ago. Be it resolved, that the incorporated and members of this corporation are not connected with the Black Muslims, nor any other Cult, at home, or abroad, directly, or indirectly, nor any secret society, societies, or the Communist Party. Be it further resolved, that this Religion of Islam, is not prejudiced towards races, colors, language, or national origin. This great religion Islam, abolishes all individual and class distinctions, thus

lays down the basis of a vast brotherhood, in which all men and women have equal rights, so much so that no one can trample upon the rights of another, and all praise is due to Allah! The ruler and sustainer of all the Worlds. (qtd. Howell 191)

Hajj Sammsan was listed as the Imam along with his wife, Gwendoline Sammsan, and Anas Hassan, as incorporating members. Hajj Ishmael Sammsan Abdullah, whose photograph appears on page 189 of Sally Howell's *Old Islam in Detroit*, passed away in Wayne, Michigan, in December of 1970. The group was dissolved in 1977.

## Overview

Overall, the impression that Dr. Morrow's data leaves is of Wali Fard Muhammad as a heretical innovator who used all the themes he plundered from an impressive range of Islamic sects and movements in the East to exalt himself in the West. For the most part, Fard was not in this process playing second fiddle to the Shiite Islamic figures of the East whose non-Western images he seized with his two hands for roles he ascribed to exalt himself, up to and including incarnate divinity.

Fard appropriated most images of militant opposition that he retailed from the region of Baluchistan which is now divided among Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan to American situations faced by his African-American converts: he did not genuinely orientate them so much to Islamic movements and states of the Third World. His Detroit follower, the hajj Ishmael Sammsan, however, did try to move from Fard's thinned-down remnants of Third World Muslims to the actual Sunni Muslims of Asia and Africa. Sammsan wanted gifted converts like himself to learn Islam in the Third World at institutions with a range of staff, and with secular-educated journalists observing, not from a single emissary to his own country. On his return home to Detroit from the Arab world he condemned Fard for having misdirected African-American converts.

# CHAPTER 1

## W.D. FARD: ISSUES OF ORIGIN

### 1.1 Introduction

Wallace D. Fard, the mystery man who appeared in Detroit, Michigan, on July 4, 1930, is an enigma wrapped in a riddle. Besides a few basic details, nothing else is known about his life (Levinsohn 47). Fard's origins and the source of his teachings have puzzled and perplexed researchers for more than three quarters of a century. According to Michael A. Gomez, "[t]here is consensus that W.D. Fard Muhammad was born outside of the United States" (277). There are, however, dissident views that will be discussed later. Likely, his perceived foreignness derived from his physical appearance. A racially ambiguous individual, W.D. Fard was described as "strange-looking" (Lomax 41). A more positive term would be "exotic." "A fair guess," wrote Peter Louis Goldman, "is that he was an Arab immigrant" (36). He was of "pale yellow coloring" (Lomax 41) and "paler than dusky" (Karim 8). From a white perspective, he had a dark European complexion (White 30). From a black perspective, he would be described as light-skinned. In the eyes of Malcolm X, he was "light-brown-skinned" (qtd. Marable 93).

W.D. Fard was described by Florence Hamlish Levinsohn (1926-1998) as being "an extraordinarily handsome, sensitive-looking man with thick dark hair and brows, what appears to be olive-colored skin, and 'white' features" (52). Based on her impressions, she figured that Fard might be viewed as a light-skinned black or a white with Mediterranean features (52). For Claude Andrew Clegg III, Fard was "fair-skinned" (21) or "beige-skinned" (198). Hazel, his common-law wife, described him as having a "dark, swarthy" complexion (qtd. Magida 48; FBI file 3 / 136). According to Karl Evanzz,

His skin was swarthy; many African Americans mistook him for a Latino or an Arab, as Detroit had America's largest Arab American community in the early 1930s. His eyes, one woman recalled, were an unusual color.

They looked “maroon,” she said. He wore expensive looking robes and usually either a maroon fez or a turban. (*Judas* 133)

“His coloring was fair,” writes Goldman, and “his hair oily black” (36). In the words of Evanzz, W.D. Fard “looked like an East Indian or perhaps a Caucasian with an enviable tan” (*The Messenger* 73). For Thomas Peele, “[h]e had olive skin” (48). To Evanzz, he “resembled a Hindu” (*The Messenger* 411). His straight hair was ebony (Karim 7; Clegg 21; DeCaro *Malcolm and the Cross* 12; Evanzz, *The Messenger* 73; *Judas* 132); his eyes were black; his white teeth were perfect; and his smile was gentle (Evanzz, *The Messenger* 73). He dressed like a fashion model and looked like a distinguished diplomat (Evanzz, *The Messenger* 73). Since W.D. Fard “looked white” (Perry 128, 143), Elijah Muhammad (1897-1975) struggled in vain to find any black African traits in his face when he first met him (Evanzz, *The Messenger* 73). As Evanzz correctly captures, “his facial features were simply not those associated with Africans” (*The Messenger* 73). Not only was his appearance intriguing, his many aliases and conflicting history made him even more mysterious. Who was this man? Where did he come from? And what was he all about? These questions were asked then and continue to be asked today.

## 1.2 A Man of Many Names

The peddler of silk, satin, and scripture, is reported to have used over fifty aliases, over the course of four years, from 1930 to 1934, including: Wallace Don Ford; Wallei Ford; Wallie D. Ford; Wally D. Ford; W.D. Ford; Wallace Farad; W.D. Feraud; Fred Dodd; One Allah; W.D. Fard; Wallace Ford; Wallie Ford; Wallace D. Fard; Wallace Don Fard; Wallace Don Farad; W.D. Farrad; W.D. Mohammed; W.D.F. Mohammed; W.D. Fard Mohammed; W.D. Farrow Mohammed; W.D. Ferrad Muhammad; Wallace Fard Muhammad; W.F. Muhammad; W.D. Farard; W.D. Farrard; W.D. Farrow; W.D. Farard; One Mahadiah; One Mohammed; Fard Muhammad; W.D.F. Mukmuk; ‘Ali Mohammad; Mohammad ‘Ali; Wali Farrad; Mohammad Wali; F. Mohammad ‘Ali; F. ‘Ali Mohammad; Farrad Mohammad; Mohammad Farrad; Allah; Wally Ford; Walker Ford; W. Ford; Moehamat ‘Ali; Mohamid ‘Ali; Mohamoud ‘Ali; Mohamed Alli; ‘Ali Mohammed; Wali Mohammed; Wallay Mohammed; Walli Mohammed; Mohammed Wali; Wallace Muhammad; Wallace D. Muhammad; Fard Mohammed; Mohammed Fard; Muhammad Fard; and W.F. Muckmuck (Evanzz, *The Messenger*, 445). He was also known as Farrad Mohammad, Mr. F.M. ‘Ali, Professor Ford, and Wali Farrad (Lomax 41; Karim 8) as well as F. Muhammad ‘Ali (Goldman 36), Wallace Delaney Fard (Perry