THE HAJJ PILGRIMAGE, ONE OF THE MANY SYMBOLS USED BY IPNA EDITORS TO MOVE AFRICAN-AMERICANS TOWARDS "ORTHODOX" ISLAM. *AL-ISLAM: THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT JOURNAL* 2, WINTER 1 (1973)

Seeing and Reading *Al-Islam*: The Visual Rhetoric of the Islamic Party of North America's Newspaper (1971-78)

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While it is well known that African-American encounters with the global religion of Islam preceded the rise of the Nation of Islam in the mid-twentieth century as a national movement, historians also recognize that it was only in the larger cultural context of the black freedom struggle that figures such as Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali could help make Islamic symbols and imagery part of black political consciousness. One can add a host of artists, musicians, and cultural figures such as Amiri Baraka, Yusef Lateef, and H. Rap Brown to this process. By the early twentieth-first century, estimates suggested that there were well over one million African-American Muslims in the United States. Various studies demonstrated that they belong to a range of different organizations and Islamic religious orientations.[1] The transformation of African-American Islam which took place between the 1960s and 1980s is a complex and fragmented story that involves a myriad of organizations and individuals who engaged with different elements of Islamic tradition in different contexts with different aims. Unfortunately, because of the dearth of documentary and literary sources from this period, scholars have largely been unable to reconstruct and understand this important chapter in American social history.

Therefore, the scholarship on this material remains unsurprisingly thin and has failed to account for a seismic shift recognizable to any observer of African-American cultural history: namely that before 1970 the majority of African-American Muslims were members of the Nation of Islam and the word Islam in most black communities was virtually synonymous with that organization; whereas by the mid-1980s African-American Muslim communities flourished in a variety of different religious orientations and the rank and file of the Nation of Islam rapidly diminished.

During this period, a number of African-American Muslim organizations emerged to further the revolutionary ideals and demands of the multifaceted movement for black empowerment. Some groups, such as the Nation of Gods and Earths (Five Percenters) and the Hanafis, splintered from the Nation of Islam and further developed aspects of its ethnocentric theological project while others, such as the Dar al-Islam and the Islamic Party of North America, blended old-world "orthodox" Islamic beliefs with African-American revolutionary practices. In doing so, African-American Muslim organizations and movements have struggled to strike a balance between adopting the allegedly race-neutral religious identity of global Islam (which materialized more in theory than in practice) and addressing the social and political needs of historically disenfranchised black communities in the United States. Naturally, the very notions of blackness and African-American identity vis-à-vis the notions of American citizenship and membership in the wider global Muslim community would become a charged subject in the discourses underlying these movements' discursive and political practices. This essay explores the way one organization, The Islamic Party of North America (IPNA), active between 1970–1978, managed this tension in its print publication *Al-Islam: The Islamic Movement Journal* published in Washington D.C. between 1971–78. More specifically, it explores the way this tension was addressed in the visual rhetoric of the paper's cover images (or lack thereof) and overall structural layout.

The IPNA was founded by Muzaffaruddin Hamid (originally

Cornelius Washington), an Atlanta-born aspiring jazz musician who converted to Islam after moving to New York City in the early 1960s. After traveling extensively throughout the Middle East and North Africa, Muzaffaruddin founded the IPNA in 1971 in Washington D.C., operating out of the Community Mosque located at 101 S Street. The organization was active in the neighborhoods surrounding Howard University where it distributed its newspapers in competition with organizations such as the Black Panther Party's *The Black Panther* and the Nation of Islam's *Muhammad Speaks*. It also competed with the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood (founded by Malcolm X) and its publication *The Western Sunrise*. The choice of images, titles, and other visual elements of the newspaper *Al-Islam* demonstrate that the editors and writers of the paper struggled to articulate both the institutional racism underlying black oppression

in the United States and the strategic platform for revolutionary change that could overcome such obstacles to freedom. The struggle can be seen in the employment of visual elements in the paper that oscillate between symbols of Islam's larger universalist dimensions and those that address the particularities of the black experience in the United States.

THE ISLAMIC PARTY OF NORTH AMERICA AND *AL-ISLAM: THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT JOURNAL*

Muzaffaruddin established the Islamic Party after becoming disaffected with the formal politics of the Islamic Center of Washington D.C., which functioned as a cultural outfit for the Arab League. In addition, the Islamic Party sought to actualize the promise and potential of Islam as a revolutionary cultural and political force to alleviate black oppression in the United States.

That the organization's headquarters were only a few blocks away from Howard University, where members regularly campaigned in competition with other black empowerment organizations, is a testament to the group's intention to participate in a nationwide cultural debate about black liberation.[2]

Among the distinctive features of the Islamic Party was its strident emphasis on ideology. IPNA used *Al-Islam* as a tool of advocacy and pedagogy as it sought to promote an alternative Islamist humanism as a remedy for social and cultural revolution in the United States. By adopting a black internationalist perspective and advocating an anti-Civil Rights logic, which argued that African-American liberation needed to be understood within the historic framework of European colonialism, the IPNA positioned itself as a critic of American institutionalized racism as well as of black nationalism.
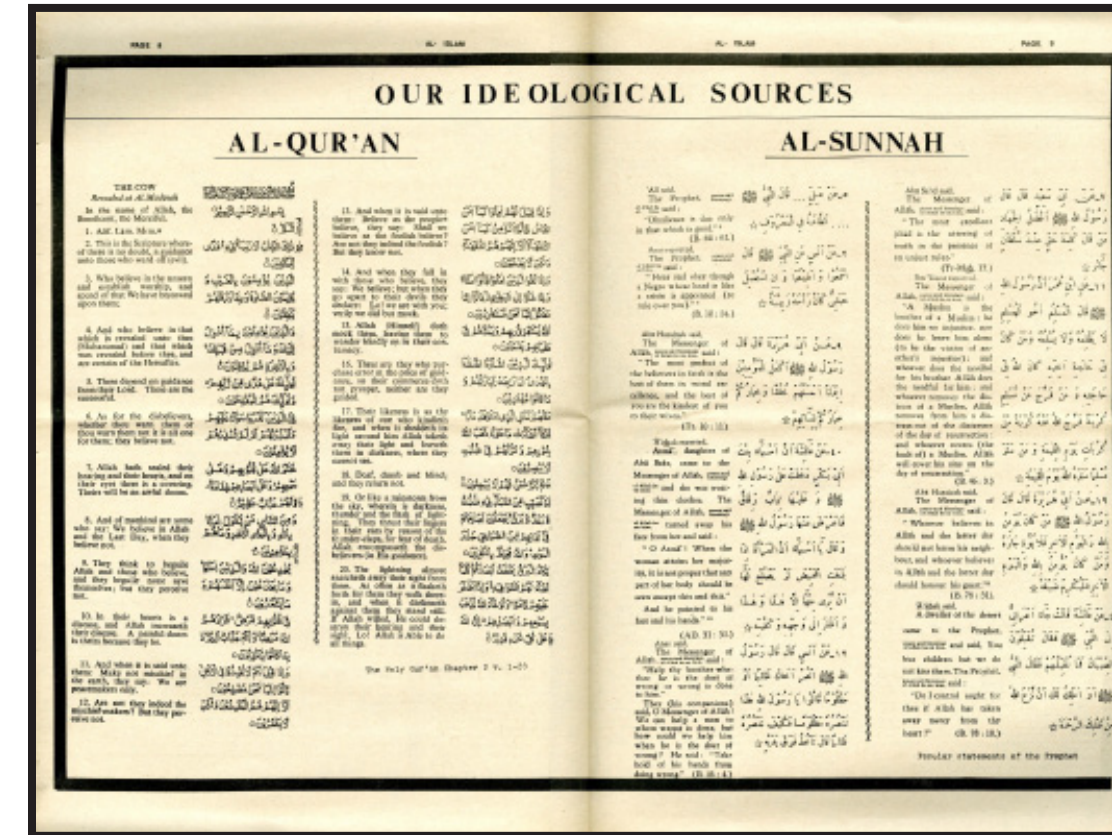
(LEFT) FIGURE 1:
The "Our Ideological Sources" section occupied the middle of the *Al-Islam* in every issue.
AL-ISLAM: THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT JOURNAL VOLUME 1, WINTER 1 (1971)

Sohail Daulatzai describes the larger intellectual context:

[W]hile Civil Rights has assumed that Black Freedom is attainable within U.S. legal frameworks and political institutions, critical Black internationalists have historically questioned that assumption, seeing white supremacy as a global phenomenon and looking to international struggles within the Third World as lenses for their own battles with white power, exploring the tactics and strategies of those struggles, and also seeking solace and solidarity by expanding their racial community of belonging. And while Civil Rights has assumed that the United States has been a force for good in the world, whether it be through fighting and eradicating Communism or any other perceived threats to U.S. national security, Black internationalists have been skeptical and have even outright challenged U.S. foreign policy, viewing it as similar to European colonialism, as an extension of Manifest Destiny and a racist logic that it practices at home.[3]

The IPNA's contribution to African-American political thought fits squarely within this intellectual landscape. In the post-Civil Rights context of ideological competition over strategies for African-American liberation, the IPNA sought to undermine what it perceived to be the provincialism of black nationalist platforms through its own vision of Islamic humanism. The visual rhetoric of the paper demonstrates this dimension of the IPNA in its deployment of Arabic font, images of mosques, and extensive use of text.

The IPNA disseminated this perspective through its main publication *Al-Islam: The Islamic Movement Journal*, which began circulation in 1971. Ranging between 16–24 pages per volume, the full size paper was intentional in promoting its strong ideological position of Islam as a panacea for African-American and Third World liberation alike. Despite changes in editorship in its early years, *Al-Islam* maintained a fairly consistent structure throughout its publication tenure. According to its former editor, Ibrahim Hanif, *Al-Islam* had a circulation of approximately 10,000 copies which were distributed nationwide to IPNA members, affiliates, and supporters. Outside of the D.C. context, in which members dispersed the papers by hand to students and community members, it is unclear how the papers were disseminated in other locations. The editorial direction of the paper was led by Muzaffaruddin, along with the other senior members of IPNA. The only existing run of the newspapers is currently housed at Georgia State University's Department of Special Collections and Archives and has been curated by the After Malcolm Digital Archive Project.[4]

The front cover of the journal was typically covered by a piece of artwork or photograph that was intended to convey a strong visual message. However, the inside content often lacked any photo or artwork altogether. The back cover throughout the first year of publication was virtually identical on each issue: the IPNA mission statement placed in a caption on the top-half/third of the page followed by another caption that provided a creedal message about Islam.[5] The center foldout was titled "Our Ideological Sources" and included on the left-hand side, under the subheading of Al-Qur'an, both translated and original Arabic verses of the central Islamic text (Figure 1). The translations were those of the well-known and highly circulated version rendered by A. Yusuf Ali. That *Al-Islam* used this translation, and not Maulana Muhammad Ali's, which was widely circulated in the African-American Muslim community, deserves note, given that it was the latter translation that was used by the Nation of Islam. The emphasis on Arabic text is a significant feature, because Arabic language and script—in this moment—came to signify Islamic orthodoxy as opposed to the purported heterodoxy of the Nation of Islam.

On the right hand side of the foldout, under the subheading of Al-Sunnah, were translations and Arabic originals of various Hadith (the Prophet Muhammad's words and actions), drawn from the text *A Manual of Hadith* by Maulana Muhammad Ali. Another core element of the paper provided translations of well-known writings of Maulana Maudoodi, Hassan al-Banna, and Sayyid Qutb. These sections were supplemented with a variety of different entries, articles, and themes. These typically included an editorial message about current events, articles about Islamic history, commentary on social and political issues, reports on IPNA activity in Washington D.C. and around the country, book reviews, discussions on family and gender, and letters of support from constituents and/or non-members. A brief review of the cover images, which in effect are the only actual images in the paper, during the first year of publication provides insight into the material and ideological culture that constituted the Islamic Party. When analyzed in their historical and discursive contexts, the images—or lack thereof—exhibit the tension *Al-Islam* editors faced between addressing the practical challenges of black oppression on the one hand and promoting Islamic humanism as a universal panacea on the other.

SEEING AND READING *AL-ISLAM*

When considered within the context of African-American newspaper culture, perhaps the most striking feature of *Al-Islam* is the dearth of graphic and photographic or other imagery in the paper. This stands in stark contrast, for example, to

"THE LACK OF IMAGES AND GRAPHICS IN THE PAPER WAS THE RESULT OF A DELIBERATE CHOICE OF THE EDITORIAL BOARD…"

the celebrated artwork of Emory Douglas, the influential Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party between 1967 and 1980. Douglas' work was prominently featured in the organization's publication, *The Black Panther*. Likewise, the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper of the Nation of Islam was covered with images, photos, and artistic works that articulated the ideas of the organization and informed readers about critical events around the world. *The Western Sunrise*, another African-American Muslim newspaper, also incorporated photos and graphics in line with conventions of the time.

According to Ibrahim Hanif, the former editor of *Al-Islam*, the lack of images and graphics in the paper was the result of a deliberate choice of the editorial board. The strategic decision was based upon two interrelated factors: the widespread Islamic doctrinal restriction on images and the intent to provide ideological training through the publication itself. While restrictions on imagery are by no means universal in Muslim cultures and traditions, many African-American Muslim groups in the late 1960s and 1970s adopted so-called "orthodox" interpretations of Islamic law in a deliberate attempt to distance and distinguish themselves from the Nation of Islam which they regarded as a heretical movement. This emphasis on purity and authenticity also informed the limiting of images and graphics in favor of providing space for religious and ideological pedagogy. That said, the paper contained structures, texts, and graphics that nonetheless conveyed the ideological orientation of the group. For example, Arabic

script on its own and/or when rendered in calligraphic form, functions as a piece of visual rhetoric in this context. Likewise, while the paper has few if any photographs or images of animate objects (per the orthodox Islamic restriction on such), the use of bold fonts, enlarged typescript, and other manipulations of text communicates visually as well as textually.

The inaugural issue of the paper, Volume 1, Winter 1 (Figure 2), includes no images or graphics whatsoever.[6] When compared to other publications in circulation at the time, the very absence of imagery in the paper made it distinct, from a visual perspective. Subsequent issues oscillated between including and omitting graphics on the cover page. The inaugural issue features a large, centrally placed Arabic calligraphic rendition of the Islamic Testimony of Faith (*Shahada*) in a black box with white letters surrounded on the top

corners with light floral patterns. That no translation is provided further augments the presence of Arabic script as a distinguishing feature of the textual emphasis of the paper. The title of the paper is rendered in lowercase lettering ("al-islam") with the subtitle in smaller caps, "The Islamic Movement Journal." The lowercase lettering of "al-islam" was likely intended to draw attention to the Arabic linguistic character of the word Islam itself; that is, the definite article "al-" renders capitalization in English redundant. It also distinguishes "al-islam" from Islam (e.g., as in Nation of Islam). In

(RIGHT) FIGURE 2:
Arabic calligraphic rendition of the Islamic Testimony of Faith, "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is His Messenger."
AL-ISLAM: THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT JOURNAL,
VOLUME 1, WINTER 1

the center of the page, in all capital and bolded typeface letters, the words "War in Islam" appear, which serve as the title of the paper's lead article. The article provides selected translations of the well-known work *al-Jihad fi al-Islam* (Jihad in Islam), written by Maulana Maudoodi, the towering Indian/Pakistani Islamist scholar, who is introduced as "one of the greatest living Islamic Revolutionary thinkers and writers." When one considers the social context and function of the paper— namely its hand-to-hand distribution on street corners and college campus courtyards—one may conclude that the initial impact of the paper's message must have been profound.

The next cover, Volume 1, Spring 1 (Figure 3), continues with the same title structure, but now comes to include a rectangular insert at the bottom of the page which functions as a table of contents, entitled "Inside Coverage." The overwhelming

majority of the page, however, is covered with a picture entitled, "Front Gates of the Prophet's Mosque—Al-Medina, Arabia." This cover stands in stark contrast to the text-heavy cover of the first issue but is consistent in the omission of any depiction of animate objects. In another sense, one could argue that there is a consistency between the two covers. That is, the Arabic calligraphy in the first issue corresponds directly to the image of the mosque in the second, and both convey symbols of Islam as an abstract and foreign, but politically relevant idea.[7]

The photo in this cover features a towering minaret and a facade of

cascading arches. That the name "Arabia" appears without "Saudi" in front of it was likely a deliberate choice that sought to negate the notion that the currently reigning Saudi royal family has any proprietary rights over the Prophet's Mosque. Of course, featuring the Prophet's Mosque on the front cover of the paper emphasizes the organization's orthodox nature. The rectangular Arabic calligraphic rendition of the Testimony of Faith featured centrally in the previous edition appears much smaller in the upper left-hand corner of the cover. The placement of this image/text, again with no translation, functions almost as a branding statement that should be considered within the repertoire of circulating images at the time. Namely, one should consider it in contradistinction to *The Black Panther*'s placement of Huey P. Newton's head-shot within a star at the top-right of that paper. Whether or not this was a deliberate choice of the *Al-Islam* editorial board

is unknown, but the visual contrast, in and of itself, is self-evident and was likely to be noticed by even a cursory viewer. Although there is no explicit mention of black nationalism on this cover, I argue that the visual messages of papers in the context of black politics communicated a subtle critique of ethnic and personality driven politics. This conclusion is corroborated by the testimonies of a number of activists from the IPNA and the Dar al-Islam, who consistently report that they were turned off by charismatic politics.

The Islamic Party's critique of black nationalism and turn towards Islamic universalism was a difficult ideological program to pursue when considering the context of emancipatory ethnic politics in the 1970s. This is especially apparent when one bears in mind that for many African-American Muslims who embarked on the journey of cultural and religious transformation,

the moral and political liberation of black peoples in the United States and around the world was the *raison d'être* of their conversion. As Edward Curtis notes, African-American Muslim identity has often been grounded in narratives of a historic connection between the religion of Islam and black peoples.[8] It is no surprise, therefore, that the third edition of the paper, Volume 1, Spring 2 (Figure 4), features a large gray image of the continent of Africa with the phrase "Islam in Africa" written so that it begins in North Africa and winds down to the bottom of the picture.[9] The title structure, typeface, and aforementioned Arabic calligraphy remain consistent on this cover. It should be noted that this is the first and only time that the continent of Africa, or any other explicit image or reference to pan-African or black nationalist symbols, appears on the front cover of the paper. Given that much of the paper's contents

in this and other issues are devoted to the topic of black nationalism vis-à-vis widespread African-American conversion to Islam, it is clear that the Islamic Party's leadership, although committed to a universalist Islamic ideal, struggled to persuade its target audience.

The remaining graphic styles and patterns of *Al-Islam*'s cover images and text do not depart radically from the precedent established in its first three editions. Throughout the remainder of the first year of publication, the covers feature images representing classical Islamic civilization. For example, Volume 1, Summer 1 features an artistically rendered open Qur'an with stylized Arabic script on the pages. A rose rests at the middle base of the Qur'an. Protruding from the center top of the Qur'an is a tall white candlestick, with a flame doubling as a sun, with the word "Allah" in the center. A calligraphic

Testimony of Faith, different from the one that appears as seal in the upper-left hand corner, is rendered as an arch across the top of the drawing. Silhouettes of the Ka'ba, the Prophet's Mosque, and minarets fill in empty space. It should be noted that this image is repeated as the cover image in the Volume 4, Fall 1 issue.

Volume 1, Summer 2 features a photo of an astrolabe, an ancient astronomical navigation device used by Muslim scientists, flanked on the two top corners by a translation of verses from
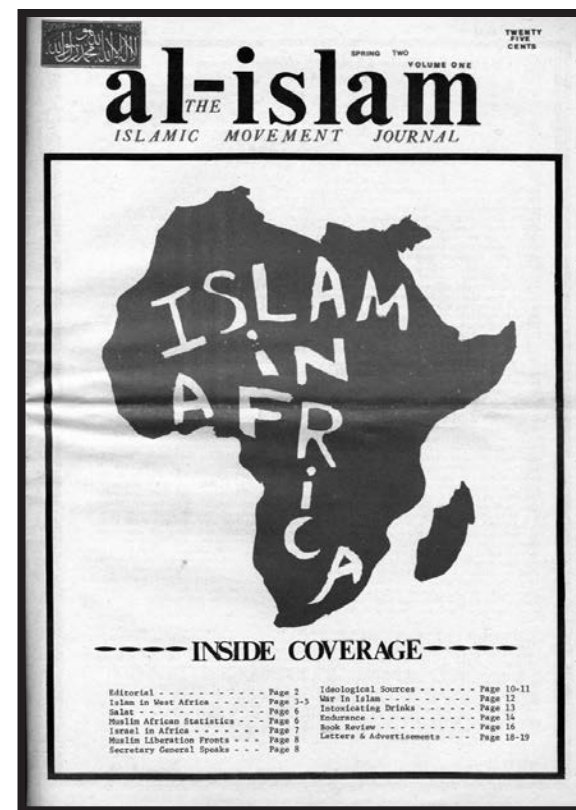
the Qur'an on the left hand side, mirrored with the original Arabic on the right. The caption reads,

This intricate astrolabe was developed by Muslim scientists in the 13th century, A.D. Arising from practical religious needs, such as the Hajj (the pilgrimage), this instrument measured time, direction and distance and was used in developing astronomy and geophysics.

The presumed connection between religious piety and scientific achievement is part of a much larger trope in global Muslim thought dating back over a century.[10] Such a link is a central feature of modern reconstructions of the Muslim world prior to the rise of western European hegemony and can be counted as one of the many by-products of colonial modernity.

Volume 1, Fall 1 features a drawing entitled, "There Shall be Light" by Madiha Umari, who is not identified

further. It depicts an imaginary landscape of minarets, domes, tents, and citadels. The various architectural elements in the picture are drawn from different parts of the Muslim world in a gesture, presumably, to the Islamic ethos of diversity and unity. In contrast, Volume 1, Fall 2 features a photo of a clenched hand with a protruding index finger held so as to represent the bearing of witness one performs upon conversion. The caption reads, "One God—One Message—One Movement." Again, the Islamic Party's struggle to balance the universalist Islamic ideals of a diverse multicultural global society of faith with the political imperatives of emancipatory politics in the 1970s is visible in contrast between the two Fall covers. The former portrays a fantastic imaginary of global Islam, abstract and distant while the latter photo of a clenched fist communicates realism, strength, and urgency. Indeed,

this visual tension and contrast may serve as a suitable metaphor for the IPNA's larger project of social and cultural revolution which consistently struggled to strike a balance between the ideal universalism of Islam and practical necessities of political action.

CONCLUSION

In many ways, the IPNA is representative of larger transformational trends in African-American Islam in the late twentieth century. The visual rhetoric of its publication *Al-Islam*, by deliberately omitting or downplaying the use images and graphics, sought to align itself with a global Islamic orthodox tradition perceived to be capable of transcending the provincialism of American racial politics. This strategy was adopted by many African-American Muslims during this

period and has colored the internal dynamics of this highly variegated community until the present moment. Recent studies, such as Sherman Jackson's *Islam and the Blackamerican*, demonstrate the way in which African-American Muslim communities continue to develop practical theological platforms that simultaneously address the realities of blackness in the United States and the possibilities of pursuing an alternative universal humanism through Islamic traditions.[11] Like the IPNA's efforts in the 1970s, African-American Muslim leaders such as Warith Deen Muhammad, Sirraj Wahhaj, and Imam Jamil Al-Amin, over the last three decades, have balanced these competing demands through piecemeal efforts. More in-depth studies of African-American Muslim articulations of race, identity, and Islamic universalism during the period between 1965 and 1985 will likely reveal the roots of discursive tensions still felt today. ■

Prophets and his lack of concern for being accountable for his deeds in the Hereafter. As a matter of fact wherever and whenever any type of evil has plagued human life, this very deviation from Allah has been the main cause of trouble. No scheme of reform in human affairs can bear fruit unless and until Obedience to Allah, belief in Man's accountability after death and adherence to the Divine Guidance as revealed through the Prophets are sincerely and actually made the basis of the entire edifice of human life. Without bringing about this fundamental change, every attempt to reform society on the basis of any of the materialistic concepts of justice (Racism, Nationalism, Capitalism, Communist-Marxism etc.), will only result in other forms of injustice.

The Islamic Party is not a nationalist party either. Its ideology transcends all geographical boundaries and encompasses the welfare of the whole world and all mankind This is why historically and today the Islamists have been and are in the forefront of the struggle for human freedom and dignity.

[6]   http://digitalcollections.library.gsu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/Islam/id/16/rec/7
[7]   http://digitalcollections.library.gsu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/Islam/id/151/rec/3
[8]   Edward E. Curtis IV, "African-American Islamization Reconsidered: Black History Narratives and Muslim Identity," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73, no. 3 (September 2005): 659–684.
[9]   http://digitalcollections.library.gsu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/Islam/id/36/rec/4
[10] For example, see: Ali Rahnema, *Pioneers of Islamic Revival* (London: Zed Books, 1994).
[11] Sherman A. Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking toward the Third Resurrection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[1]   Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience* 2nd ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003); Edward Curtis, *Islam in Black America: Identity, Liberation, and Difference in African-American Islamic Thought* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002); Amina McCloud, *African-American Islam* (New York: Routledge, 1997). For demographics see, Tom. W. Smith, "The Muslim Population of the United States: The Methodology of Estimates," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (Autumn 2002): 404–417; "Muslim Americans: No Signs of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism" Pew Research Center, August 30, 2011, http://www.people-press.org/2011/08/30/muslim-americans-no-signs-of-growth-in-alienation-or-support-for-extremism/
[2]   Information regarding the formation of the Islamic Party of North America was obtained from oral histories conducted under the auspices of the After Malcolm Digital Archive in addition to Khaled Fattah Griggs, "The Islamic Party of North America: A Quiet Storm of Political Activism" in *Muslim Minorities in the West: Visible and Invisible*, Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane I. Smith, eds., (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2002) 77–106.
[3]   Sohail Daulatzai, *Black Star, Crescent Moon: The Muslim International and Black Freedom beyond America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012) xii.
[4]   The After Malcolm Digital Archive is a collaborative research initiative that seeks to document, digitize and preserve the history of African-American Islamic movements between 1965 and 1985. It is co-directed by Dr. Abbas Barzegar of the Department of Religious Studies at Georgia State University and Dr. Bilal King of the Department of Sociology at Morehouse College. More information about the project can be found at sites.gsu.edu/am
[5]   The two captions read as follows:
        The Islamic Party of Masjid-ul-Ummah is an ideological party in the widest sense and not a mere political party or a religious or social reform organization. It is based on the firm conviction that Islam is an all pervading and comprehensive 'Order of Life' which it intends to promulgate and translate into action in all spheres of human life. The party believes that the root cause of all troubles in man's life is his forgetfulness of Allah (God) Almighty, his disregard of Divine Guidance as revealed through the