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Early U.S. Latina/o — African-American Muslim Connections: Paths to Conversion

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Introduction[1]

While the literature concerning Latina/o Muslims in the United States has been growing, much about them still has yet to be explored, including the history of those who converted through joining African-American-majority Islamic groups prior to 1975 (the year of the formation of perhaps the first U.S. Latina/o Muslim organization, Alianza Islamica).[2] This paper, then, aims at presenting a more in-depth look at the historical growth of U.S. Latina/o Muslims in the context of their connection with African-American Muslims up to the early 1980s. I will begin by presenting a theoretical approach for understanding the religious conversions of Latino Muslims. I assert that we must understand their conversions as rejections and/or redefinitions of dominant discourses. I will then move on to a discussion of the historical context of the social, cultural, and ideological connections of Latina/os with African Americans, which will help us contextualize the evidence for Latina/os becoming Muslim through African-American social networks. Because of Latina/o Muslims' small numbers in the early years and difficulty of accessing primary sources that might mention them, the findings in this paper should be seen as tentative and preliminary, with the hope that future scholarship will continue to shed more light.

[1] I would like to thank Shafiq Muhammad and Juan Galvan for their insights as have I pursued my research. However, any errors in this paper are entirely my own.

[2] Most of the treatment of U.S. Latino Muslims has been journalistic; academic writing on the topic is still fairly minimal, and mention of Latino Muslims has largely only been in the context of other topics. Notable scholarly works that focus primarily on U.S. Latino Muslims include Hisham Aidi's "Let Us be Moors: Islam, Race and 'Connected Histories'," *Middle East Report* 229 (2003): 42–53; "'Verily, There is Only One Hip-Hop Umma': Islam, Cultural Protest and Urban Marginality," *Socialism and Democracy* 18/2 (2004): 107–126; and "Jihadis in the Hood," *Middle East Report* 224 (2002): 36–43; Bill Weinberg, "Muslims in the Americas Face Scrutiny," *NACLA Report on the Americas* (2003): 25–27; Lisa Viscidi, "Latino Muslims a Growing Presence in America," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 22/5 (2003): 56–58; Edward SpearIt Maldonado, *God Behind Bars: Race, Religion, & Revenge* Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara. (Ann Arbor: UMI Publishing, 2006); and Hijamil A. Martinez-Vazquez, *Latina/o Y Musulman: The Construction of Latina/o Identity among Latina/o Muslims in the United States* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), the last of which is the first book to focus solely on U.S. Latino Muslims.

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Before proceeding we must clarify three things. First, this paper will be examining U.S. Latino Muslims since the early 20th century. These individuals were probably not the first U.S. Latina/o Muslim converts, nor were they the first Latina/o Muslims in the area that is now known as the United States. There is at least one confirmed conversion of a Latina to Islam in southern California in the early 20th century as the result of the marriage of a Mexican-American woman to a Punjabi immigrant, and it is likely that there were more at that time and place.[3] In addition, research into the history of pre-Columbian exploration of the Americas and of enslaved persons brought to the Americas has shown that a number of these Iberian-connected persons (and many of African descent) were Muslims, and that some of the slaves may have been brought to what is now the U.S. in as early as the 16th century.[4] Besides a few clear examples,[5] there is little direct evidence to prove that these Iberian-connected enslaved persons in the region now known as the U.S. were in fact Muslims. But, taking into account the locations from which they were extracted, Michael Gomez has concluded that we cannot rule out the possibility, especially if we include Puerto Rico where, by it originally being colonized by the Spanish, all African Muslims there could be considered "Latino." Nonetheless, there is little evidence that the Islamic practices of any of these enslaved Muslims were maintained up through the 20th century.[6] This, however, brings up another issue: that of defining "Latino." While the Latino American Dawah Organization (LADO) includes in its "Latino" or "Hispanic" Muslim literature conversion stories from people who have cultural ties from Spain and Portugal to Malaysia,[7] there is some dispute within the "Latino" community as to who can or should or would want to identify as such. Early enslaved persons brought via Iberian traders, for example, were often forced by their captives to take Latin names in the interim between their captivity and sale to Americans — Should we count these people as "Latino"?[8] Similarly, members of various Islamic-based groups reject such an identity (as we shall see). And of course, not all "Latino" Muslims even identify themselves as such, focusing instead sometimes solely on their religious identity and sometimes on their nation of origin identity.[9] Nevertheless, for analytical purposes, I will follow the lead of LADO and identify as "Latina/o" all who may self-identify as such and those who have an Iberian (Spanish and Portuguese) cultural

[3] Karen Isaksen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 130, n.36.

[4] For a discussion of evidence on pre-Columbian Muslim exploration and possible inhabitance in the Americas, see Abdullah Hakim Quick, *Deeper Roots* (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1996), chapter 2.

[5] For example, Mahommah Gardo Baquadqua. See Allan D. Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum America* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

[6] Michael A. Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 13, 18–20, 128–35, 144–52. Also see Jane Landers, "Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose: A Free Black Town in Spanish Colonial Florida," *The American Historical Review* 95/1 (1990): 9–30.

[7] Patrick D. Bowen, "US Latina/o Muslim Conversion Narratives," paper presented at AAR Rocky Mountain Region, April 2010.

[8] Gomez, 129.

[9] Bowen, "Narratives."

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heritage connection from the Peninsula to Malaysia. Of course, because sometimes we cannot know if persons deceased or inaccessible may have this connection, our findings cannot be exhaustive, but can only provide a sense of what has taken place. Finally, along the lines of identity issues: many traditional (Sunni and Shiʿi) Muslims do not consider such Islamic-based groups as the Ahmadiyyas and the Nation of Islam (NOI) to be "Islamic." Furthermore, some groups which have clear ties to other Islamic-based groups, for example, the Five Percenters/Nation of Gods and Earths, do not consider themselves "Muslim." However, because these groups developed out of a conception of what it means to be "Muslim" and have for a long time served as the means to introduce many individuals to Islamic concepts and practices before they converted to more traditional Islamic groups, I will also include them in the present study and leave the religious designation of their Islamic-ness to members of the groups themselves.

Religious Conversion and Rejection and/or Redefinition of Dominant Discourses

While the idea of "religious conversion" may seem straightforward, often it is not clear for several reasons, beginning with the fact that there is not and has not been even a universal consensus of what the term "religion" means.[10] Does "religion" only refer to a particular set of practices? An experience of feeling connected with that which is transcendent? The amount of one's piety or devotion? An institution that requires exclusive devotion? A particular set of beliefs dealing with ultimate meaning? — And if it does refer to some beliefs concerning ultimate meaning, can we easily distinguish between "religion" and "ideology"? Furthermore, even if we were to decide on a working definition of "religion" — say a somewhat cohesive set of beliefs and practices which revolve around an understanding of ultimate meaning — identifying "religious conversion" might still be difficult.[11] Does "conversion" require the adherence to a religion that is different from the family or cultural background from which one emerges? Does it require a profound emotional or transcendental experience? Does it require an immediate and complete turn to the new religion, severing all other "religious" ties? In an age of pluralism, with church-hopping and spiritual seeking[12] — or even just considering the

[10] For important discussions on the topic, see, for example, Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963); Mark C. Taylor, *After God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); S.N. Balagangadhara, *"The Heathen in his Blindness . . ."* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1994); Masuzawa, Tomoko, *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion* (New York: Continuum, 2005).
[11] On problems surrounding the idea of "religious conversion," see A.D. Nock, *Conversion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961 [1933]); Zeba A. Crook, *Reconceptualising Conversion* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004); Lewis Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).
[12] Along the lines of Wade Clark Roof's *A Generation of Seekers* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993).

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frequent job and home relocation and subsequent identity and meaning system changes one must make with these[13] — how can we satisfactorily define "conversion"?

One way out of this potential quagmire is to take note of the approach of Richard Brent Turner who, instead of focusing on the ideas of "religion" or "conversion" in his analysis of "Islam in the African-American Experience," follows Charles H. Long and examines the *signs* and *significations* of Islam among African-Americans.[14] Long understands the debates over the concept of "religion" (and we can safely assume he would include "conversion" as well) to be debates and power struggles over the use of particular signs/discourses.[15] In short, "religions" can be seen as symbol systems — discourses —, even if they are other things as well (e.g. an experience of the transcendent). In fact, we exist, inescapably, in a world of discourses; not just of "religion," but of "science," "rationalism," "race," "ethics," etc. And human beings, whose only way of communicating with each other is through symbols/signs/discourses, are forced to deal with the discourses in which their worlds are embedded. Of course, some discourses have more power over others, especially those controlled by people with the economic and physical power to institute theirs, and their discourses usually benefit themselves. Thus we see a rise of a racist system that put white Europeans (who had gained dominant economic power in the 16th century) hierarchically above brown- and black-skinned individuals; European ideas of religion (Christian, individualistic, text-based, adaptable to science) were raised as the standard; European normative cultural behaviors and thought patterns became normative "sanity;" and modern European-derived concepts of group unity — "nations" — were also elevated to the status of normative.

However, there is a level more foundational than that of the discourse: the systemic structures which actually shape the discourses. These are what Michel Foucault investigated in his "archaeologies."[16] Foucault observed that the structures of how discourses and the physical powers of discipline were ordered in the Western world began changing in similar directions at roughly the same time: in the early-to-mid-17th century (what Foucault calls the "Classical Age") and then in the late 18th–early 19th century (what Foucault calls the "Modern Age"). In short, as knowledge progressively became more ordered (e.g., the use of *taxa* and *mathesis*) and thus more able to be "gazed" and analyzed and then disconnected from a dependency on the world's (and its

[13] Stefano Allievi, *Les Convertis a L'Islam* (Montreal: L'Harmattan, 1998), 22–23.
[14] Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience* 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 2–3.
[15] Charles H. Long, *Significations, Signs, Symbols and Images In The Interpretation Of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 2–8.
[16] His main monographs are *History of Madness,* ed. J. Khalifa, trans. J. Murphy and J. Khalifa (Abingdon, England: Routledge, 2006 [1961]); *Birth of the Clinic,* trans. A. Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973 [1963]); *The Order of Things* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970 [1966]); *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* trans. A. Smith (London: Routledge, 2001 [1969]); *The History of Sexuality: Vol I,* trans. R. Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978 [1976]); *Discipline and Punish,* trans. A. Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

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signs) divine origins (*divinatio*), we also see that the structures of regulating and understanding human lives also became more ordered and opened to the gaze of those who possessed the knowledge to order things. These deep structures became so embedded in Western culture that even those who did not possess the power/knowledge still participated in its exercise. For example, even for those who would, as we see with African-American Muslims, rebel against certain discourses like the superiority of Christianity and white skin, they still felt obliged to use modern-style forms of "logic" and "science," and were clearly disciplining themselves with their rigid intellectual and moral discourses. It should be noted here that while Foucault downplayed connection of these fundamental structures to material conditions in order to distinguish these deep structures from the more superficial layers of "ideas,"[17] he of course recognized their importance.[18] In fact, Foucault's Classical Age and Modern Age coincide almost perfectly with the world-historical shifts identified by Marshall Hodgson as the "Western Transmutation" and the "Technical Age" which were the result of increasing contact between people and the raising of the levels of control of materials on a worldwide level, as well as the increasing destructive capability of modern armaments which forced people into urban areas and develop capitalistic means to create the kind of wealth necessary to compete in a world in such a state.[19] The point that I am stressing here is that the people who are often the subjects of oppressive discourses and disciplining structures have not only to engage those discourses (signs), but they also must negotiate these signs with the modern world's material realities and its disciplining powers. What this means is that, with the spread of high levels of technological innovation in the modern age, and since the late 19th century, the relative material prosperity that brought increased ease of living for all but the poorest of the people, the individuals who do not favor the dominant discourses (and they may think this way because of access to a variety of new ideas due to an increasing spread of information that may reveal the contradictions between particular dominant discourses — e.g., the juxtaposition of racism with the doctrine of equality of all people) were now intellectually and physically capable of challenging those discourses, though limited in part by the disciplining structures. Thus we witnessed the challenging of dominant discourses, famously done in the writings and actions of the anti-colonialist national independence activists, such as Aime Cesaire and Frantz Fanon (both of whose visions of the world rejected certain dominant discourses, but certainly abided by others, and supported disciplining systems).[20] Therefore, because of the history of the 20th century U.S. in which material prosperity brought relative high physical and intellectual freedom,

[17] Foucault, *Archaeology*, 48.
[18] Foucault, "Power/Knowledge," in *Political Philosophy: The Essential Texts,* ed. S. M. Cahn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 512, the key statement being: "They [his "archaeologies"] are precisely anti-science. Not that they vindicate a lyrical right to ignorance or non-knowledge: it is not that they are concerned to deny knowledge . . ."
[19] Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *Venture of Islam* vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 176–204.
[20] Aime Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism,* trans. J. Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000 [1950]); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* trans. R. Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008 [1952]); *The Wretched of the Earth,* trans. R. Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004 [1961]).

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this has allowed many individuals — in fact, whole movements of people — to reject and/or redefine many discourses, something that has not always been possible when access to alternative discourses and the means to use them were more limited. But it also meant adopting new discourses that fit within the more fundamental systems; for example, a stress on science, the material world, rationality, capitalistic economics, and individuality[21] — all of which appeared among the groups into which the new Latina/o Muslim converted.

Moreover, the dominant discourses in the West and the U.S. have had a long history of having multiple links, all hierarchical and reinforcing the legitimization of the people who have material power: for example the discourses on the superiority of Christianity[22] being linked with whiteness (and race and beauty) and intelligence,[23] sanity,[24] and nationalism.[25] So, to kink one link in any one of these discourses could have resulted in the sending of ripples through the others; though at the same time these discourses were also very much reinforced by, besides their connections with disciplining structures, their being connected to these numerous other discourses which all held certain claims that could support the others'. Therefore, *effective* rejection, or at least redefinition, of dominant discourses would likely have demanded the simultaneous rejection/ redefinition of other dominant discourses.

In returning to the issue of religious conversion, then, we must see that, if it involves new sign/discourse negotiations — especially the rejection of a dominant one, such as Christianity —, and that if the subject population is an oppressed group and desires to reject other dominant discourses, then a "religious conversion" is much more than merely "religious." As we will see, the history of U.S. Latina/o conversions to African-American Islamic groups involves the renegotiations of multiple levels of discourses, and this affected identities, meaning systems, ethics, and practices.

The Latina/O – African-American Connection in the Eastern U.S.

In order to understand why Latins/os and African-American *Muslims* formed connections, we need to briefly discuss the complex connections between Latina/os and

[21] See Hodgson, 188–95.
[22] See note 10.
[23] See Long; Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance!* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002 [1982]) and J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971 [1963]); George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (New York: Howerd Fertig, Inc., 1978).
[24] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Alexander Thomas and Samuel Sillen, *Racism and Psychiatry* (New York: Citadel Press, 1972); Thomas S. Szasz, *The Manufacture of Madness* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).
[25] Leon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth* Trans. Edmund Howard (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1974 [1966]); Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Edwin Bryant, *The Quest for the Origins of Vedic Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* Rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006 [1983]).

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African Americans *in general* in the eastern U.S. (and by which I include Chicago, as it was relatively "eastern" for many Latino immigrants, especially those from Mexico), where the African-American Muslim groups rose and are still mostly concentrated. First of all, as I alluded to earlier, "Latino" describes people who may be phenotypically "black," at least from the dominant U.S. perspective, especially those from the Caribbean, and so these individuals often were able (and willing) to more easily build social connections with African-American communities, especially prior to the 1970s.[26] However, the dominant racial structure of the U.S., particularly in the early 20th century eastern U.S. when and where Latina/o populations were much small than they are today,[27] stressed the racial binary (black/white) and did not fully account for those with Iberian-cultural connections, nor for those with lighter brown skin and ostensibly non-"African" features.[28] Those with less-dark skin occupied a more ambiguous position and could, on occasion, pass for white, or at least occupy a precarious middle-caste status.[29] Of course, many if not most Latinos in the eastern U.S. still experienced (and continue to experience) racism, often in the form of hate speech and violence and in terms of restrictions in access to jobs and resources.[30] In addition to sharing with African Americans the experiences of racism and a shared desire to defend themselves from that racism (and thus a desire to reject the dominant discourse), the housing and employment

[26] Cf. Reuel Rogers, "Afro-Caribbean Immigrants, African Americans, and the Politics of Group Identity," in *Black and Multiracial Politics in America,* eds. Y. M. Alex-Assensoh and L. J. Hanks (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 31. Also, as Gregory Rodriguez points out, there were several marriages between the Mexican Americans and African Americans throughout their contact in the U.S. *Mongrels, Bastards, Orphans, and Vagabonds* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007), xv, 83, 173–75.

[27] See Agustin Lao-Montes, "Introduction," in *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York,* eds. A. Lao-Montes and A. Davila (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 19–22 and Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, "Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals By Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For The United States, Regions, Divisions, and States," *U.S. Census Bureau* (2002) http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/twps0056.html

[28] Gossett, 28; Jose Itzigsohn and Carlos Dore-Cabral, "The Manifold Character of Panethnicity," in *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York,* eds. A. Lao-Montes and A. Davila (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 325. Also, consider, for example, the experience of Carlos Cadena, who was a lawyer for the first case by Mexican Americans to be heard by the U.S. Supreme Court (1954): "I opened the argument and I said 'Your petitioner is a . . . an American citizen of Mexican descent' and one of the judges asked me 'What is that?' 'What the-you stupid guy everybody knows what that is!' But anyway I was explaining and Justice Frankfurter interrupted and said 'they call him greasers down there don't they?'" From *A Class Apart* (PBS documentary film, 2009).

[29] See, for example, Rogers, 20; Jorge Klor de Alva, Earl Shorris, and Cornel West, "Our Next Race Question: The Uneasiness Between Blacks and Latinos," in *The Latino Studies Reader,* eds. A. Darder and R. D. Torres (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 180–9; Gustavo Chacon Mendoza, "Gateway to Whiteness: Using the Census to Redefine and Reconfigure Hispanic/Latino Identity, in Efforts to Preserve a White American National Identity," *University of La Verne Law Review* 20/1 (2008): 160–71. Also, Rodriguez, 71–85, 173–75 provides instructive examples (though from the Southwestern U.S.) of how whites who were used to the binary racial system dealt with adding Latina/os into their worldviews.

[30] Lao-Montes, 10–11.

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stratification of the U.S. also placed Latina/os and African Americans in relative close physical proximity.[31] The potential for forming social bonds, therefore, was high.

Latina/os, of course, largely sought group support within their own ethnic or national origin communities, forming their various mutual aid, protest, religious, and social organizations.[32] But because, until the last quarter of the 20th century, the Latina/o populations in the East were much smaller than African-Americans',[33] the Latina/o organizations tended to be smaller as well, and so the larger African-American groups were thus seen by non-African-American minorities as important loci of resistance to oppression. And African-American groups also sometimes saw Latina/o groups as valuable allies, especially in the 1960s and '70s, and so there was much coalition-building.[34] In fact, there is also a history of Latinos (only men) as being members of predominantly African-American freemasonry groups, which were important antecedents to African-American Islam.[35]

Meanwhile, as Latino immigration continued to increase, this led to even more possible interaction with African Americans. This eventually helped produce the new composite (discursive) culture of hip hop, which, as we will see, brought together cultural elements of African Americans, Latina/os, and Islam. Over the years, however, with increasing immigration (Latina/o and Muslim) and the resulting growth, strengthening, and diversifying of many previously small enclaves within the U.S. Latina/o community, dependence on African-American connections for Latina/os coming to Islam has relatively decreased in proportion to conversion networks based on immigrant Muslims and the growing number of Latina/o Muslim themselves.

Latina/os and African-American Muslims

The rejection of dominant discourses was a major theme with the first sizeable groups of Muslim converts in the U.S. These groups were primarily African-American, though on occasion some Latinos joined, in spite of the fact that these groups' messages were by and large directed towards African Americans. Because much of the evidence for earlier converts is text-based and admittedly meager, we cannot be sure about the physical appearance of all the early Latina/o converts — whether or not they were "black" in the dominant U.S. view. Nor do we know much about the individual motivations for conversion of these Latina/os. Therefore, as I stated in the introduction, the evidence and analysis presented here is preliminary and suggestive only — and in

[31] For example, see Wilfredo Cruz, *City of Dreams: Latino Immigration to Chicago* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007), 11, 72–76.
[32] See Armando Xavier Mejia, "Protest Politics," in *Latino Americans and Political Participation: A Reference Handbooks,* eds. A. X. Mejia and S. A. Navarro (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 57–87.
[33] See Gibson and Lao-Montes, 19–22.
[34] For an introductory discussion of the issue, see Yvette M. Alex-Assensoh, "Introduction: In Search of Black and Multiracial Politics in America," in *Black and Multiracial Politics in America,* eds. Y. M. Alex-Assensoh and L. J. Hanks (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 1–12.
[35] Gomez, 243–44; Robert Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 18–9, 22–25; Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Sacred Drift* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1993), 21–28.

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the case of the Moorish Science evidence, indirect and inferential at best —, and should be compared against future research. Also, it is important to note that while there were U.S. converts to Islam prior to these groups, those earlier converts were for the most part solitary individuals, or very small and short-lived groups, and as of yet no evidence has emerged linking Latinos, outside of those converts who came to Islam through marriage to Muslims, to these groups.[36]

Moorish Science

Scholars of the history of Islam among African Americans tend to attribute to Noble Drew Ali and his Moorish Science Temple a seminal role in popularizing "Islam" (in a symbolic sense) among African Americans.[37] While there are competing legends of this important figure's background, Moorish Science tradition and available evidence generally holds that Timothy Drew was born in 1886 in North Carolina and opened what he (by then known as Noble Drew Ali) called the Canaanite Temple in Newark, New Jersey in 1913. Then, after a few years there followed by a brief hiatus, Drew relocated to Chicago to open by the mid-1920s what would eventually be known as the Moorish Science Temple of America.[38] In one of the first books to present in-depth ethnographies on urban African-American religious sectarian movements, Arthur Fausett noted that some practices of the Moorish Science Temple were unique to, or at least very rare among African-American religious groups: they strictly adhered to their religious program's time schedule, they did not eat any meat or drink alcohol, their religious meetings were very subdued with little movement and low voices, and men and women were segregated when seated in the temple.[39] All these practices which, by emphasizing a subdued, sober (and thus "rational"), ascetic, and individualistic approach to religion — one thus very Protestant-, "modern"-, and middle class-like[40] — went against popular negative stereotypes/discourses of African Americans,[41] though also showed an adjustment to the underlying structures of knowledge and power. In addition to their unique practices, like other storefront groups at the time, Moorish Science promoted the

[36] I am here referring to a number of things: the possible conversion to Islam of enslaved persons of African descent, for which evidence is very slight, though it is likely to have taken place; the scattered conversions of U.S. whites, primarily those who were abroad in the Muslim world, in the 19th century; the small following of Alexander Russell Webb; the movement of Sufi Abdul Hamid; that of Satti Majid Mal-Qadi Suwar al-Dhahab; and other early Sunni groups — though further investigation may reveal Latino connections.

[37] Gomez, 203; Turner, 71–72, 107; Dannin, 31–32; Yvonne Haddad and Jane Smith, *Mission to America* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1993), 80.

[38] Because of the little documentation of the early phases of the group, there are conflicting dates for these events prior to 1926.

[39] Arthur Fausett, *Black Gods of the Metropolis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002 [1944]), 50–51.

[40] Traits similar to those defined by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* Transl. Talcott Parsons (New York: Scribner, 1958).

[41] As pointed out by John Szwed, "Introduction," in *Black Gods of the Metropolis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002 [1944]), xx–xxi.

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development of Moor-owned and managed businesses, to help make the community less reliant on white economic (oppressive) power structures. These practices would become common traits among the African-American-majority Islamic groups.

On top of *practices* that rejected certain dominant discourses, Moorish Science offered *doctrines* which rejected and redefined others, blazing a trail for several future African-American Islamic groups. Notable for our purposes are doctrines concerning three issues: 1) the location of heaven and hell, 2) the divinity of the individual, and 3) the ethno/cultural/religious/national history and identity of the world's people.[42] 1) Largely borrowing from Rosicrucian writings and the book *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ* by Levi H. Dowling, Noble Drew Ali's *Holy Koran* (not to be confused with the Qur'ān) exhibited themes found in New Thought and esoteric religious movements of the 19th and early 20th century U.S., including a emphasis on the individual not being a prisoner to his or her own circumstances. With this, an important theme is that heaven and hell are not physical locations above and below the earth, but are states of mind (the "higher" and "lower" "selves") that one can achieve through knowledge and spiritual and physical practices. Heaven is equated with joy and peace while hell is unpleasant circumstances created by people, and evil is associated with jealousy, hate, and lust.[43] 2) In the same vein, the attributes of God — which include the attributes of heaven, but also of wisdom — are within the individual.[44] As scholars of Moorish Science have pointed out, the discourse of the divinity of the individual was a prominent theme among several early 20th-century African-American religious sects, and reflected an attempt to reject the dominating, and what was perceived as oppressive power of the Church.[45] Interestingly, one of the main figures out of these groups was Bishop Charles "Daddy" Grace, who claimed to be "Negro and Portuguese," indicating that this movement for believing in an internal divinity which could help break free (at least spiritually) from oppressive circumstances was attractive to not only whites and African-Americans, but also for "Latina/os." 3) It is with the Moorish Science doctrines concerning the ethno-national identity of the world's people that we see a more direct connection between African-American Muslims and Latina/os. Drew Ali's *Holy Koran* holds that African Americans are not "black" or "Negros" — they are "Moors," whose true religion is Islam, and are descendents of the Canaanites and Moabites in what is known as northwest "Africa" (in the region of Morocco). "Africa," however, is not the "true" name of this continent; its "first true and divine name" is Amexem, and had once included Atlantis and the Americas until a great earthquake separated the lands. (Amexem is in fact part of "Asia" which is all land that is not in Europe.) Prior to the earthquake, the Moors spread throughout and populated Amexem. Therefore, the native inhabitants of the Americas

[42] For a fuller treatment of the doctrines of Moorish Science, see Gomez, Turner, Dannin, Haddad and Smith, and Wilson.
[43] Noble Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple of America* (n.p., 1927), 3:17; 7: 24; 12: 6–12; 27:11.
[44] Drew Ali, chapter 1; 19:37; 41:21.
[45] See Gomez, 210–12.

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are also "Moslems," Islam being their true religion. Furthermore, "According to all true and divine records of the human race there is no negro, black, or colored race attached to the human family, because all the inhabitants of Africa (Amexem) were and are of the human race . . ."[46] Moorish Science had included those who might be called Latina/os directly in its doctrines, at once challenging Western systems of race, religion, and nationality which had been for so long intimately connected,[47] all while grounding it with biblical figures to which Christians of all "races" could recognize. To signify this rejection, members would change a symbol that they carried with them throughout their lives: their names, by adding to the end of them an "El" or "Bey."[48]

In the racist urban northern cities, in which poverty, disease, crime, and vices — all which were exacerbated by racism and ghettoization of minorities — plagued their communities, this message of hope for joy and peace and of rejection of the dominant discourses which played a major role in the imposition of these difficulties by disproportionately subjugating minorities to them, quickly became very popular in the rapidly enlarging ghettos. By the time of Drew Ali's death in July of 1929, it had become the "first mass religious movement in the history of Islam in America," with an estimated 30,000 total members (and perhaps many more) spread across the eastern U.S. cities, and 10,000 in Chicago alone.[49] At that time, some 20,000 Latina/os were living in Chicago.[50] In a 1929 issue of the Moorish Science Temple bi-monthly periodical, the *Moorish Guide*, a Juanita Richardson-Bey, who is listed as the managing editor and was also the secretary-treasurer of the Young People's Moorish League, published a poem. While "Juanita" was a popular name among non-Latino African Americans in the early 20th century (probably having something to do there being two popular song by that name since the 19th century, neither of which were written or made famous by performances by Latina/os), and despite the contents of her poem being in English and giving no indication of her heritage, the poem was entitled "Dio de mio" — which could be either an Italian spelling or a misspelling of the Spanish "Dios."[51] There is little other available evidence for the membership of Latina/os in early Moorish Science, but it is interesting to note that at the funeral for Drew Ali, Charles Kirkman Bey, an attorney who had been the grand legal advisor for the Moorish Science Temple under Drew Ali and who would become the leader of the majority of the Moors (after a schism following Drew Ali's death), is reported to have given a eulogy in English, Arabic, and Spanish.[52] After the death of Drew Ali, Moorish Science went through multiple schisms and their numbers great reduced. While there is little documented evidence of Latina/o participation in later manifestations, its several

[46] Drew Ali, chapters 45–47.
[47] See note 25.
[48] Arna Bontemps and Jack Conroy, *Anyplace But Here* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966 [1945]), 206–07.
[49] Turner, 71–2; Gomez, 260; Haddad and Smith, 92.
[50] Cruz, 9–12.
[51] Gomez, 261–62.
[52] Wilson, 39, 46; Michael Muhammad Knight, *The Five Percenters* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007), 21.

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possible appealing features, its known openness to all races,[53] and the continuing rise of Latina/o immigration, taking into account numerous online anecdotes confirming it, it is highly probable that Latina/os have been members since the 1920s.

The Ahmadiyya Movement

During the period between Noble Drew Ali's first appearance in Newark and his meteoric rise by the late 1920s, another Islamic movement which promoted a rejection of dominant discourses in the U.S. attracted thousands of African Americans: that of the Ahmadiyyas. In the very first years of its mission in America while it focused on bringing in whites and then African Americans, it drew a number of Latina/os as well.

In the late 1870s, Ghulām Aḥmad, a Punjabi born in a family known to be dedicated to religious learning and piety, and himself a passionate student of religion, began receiving continuous divine "revelations." Over time, he came to believe that while Islam is the true religion and that its basic principles and five pillars were still valid, overall it needed reform, and he saw his own role as the renewer (*mujaddid*). In 1889, he announced that he was a new messiah (*mahdī*, in the line of Jesus and Muhammad), and set out to spread his new teachings throughout the world, gaining a large following before his death in 1908.[54] By 1913, the Ahmadis had their first convert in England, and it was from their mosque in Woking, London, that the Ahmadis sent their first missionary to the U.S. in 1920: Mufti Muhammad Ṣādiq. Ṣādiq arrived in Philadelphia on February 15 of that year but was immediately seized by authorities upon them finding out that he was a Muslim, as they believed Islam to be a religion of polygamy, which was outlawed in the U.S. He was then detained for several weeks in a New Jersey detention house where he converted several people who were detained with him, including among them a Spaniard, a Portuguese man, two men from the Azores, and one Honduran.[55] Released in April on the condition that Ṣādiq would not preach polygamy, he set up his first headquarters in New York City and began a vigorous program of proselytization. Over the next few years Ṣādiq would give dozens, maybe hundreds, of lectures at churches, schools, and other institutions. He sent out thousands of pieces of mail about the Ahmadiyyas to private individuals (including celebrities), libraries, Masonic lodges, churches, and other institutions. He immediately gained hundreds of converts (to whom he would give an Islamic name), both those who met him face-to-face and those who converted through the reading of Ahmadi materials and wrote letters to Ṣādiq proclaiming their conversions. In October of 1920, Ṣādiq moved his headquarters to Chicago because of its more central location in the U.S., and it would be, aside from a sojourn in Highland Park, Michigan, his main center until he left the U.S. in 1923.[56] During his time in the U.S., Ṣādiq's message changed. At first, his message was primarily concerned with interreligious unity, and he directed his attention at the local nominal Muslims and white

[53] Wilson, 23–24.
[54] Haddad and Smith, 51–53.
[55] See Turner, 114–17; *The Moslem Sunrise* 1/1 (1921): 12.
[56] Turner, 117–33.

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Christians. There was, in addition, an element of racial harmony, and the brown-skinned Ṣādiq attracted several African Americans from the beginning as well, and this led to several interethnic and interracial marriages among the U.S. Ahmadiyyas.[57] Nonetheless, as time passed and Ṣādiq increasingly experienced racism himself and local Muslims began to consider his teachings, particularly of the new *mahdī*, heretical, he was more and more disillusioned with the prospects of achieving interreligious and interracial unity, and began directing his message towards African Americans, emphasizing in it the idea that all races are equal in Islam, a tendency continued with U.S. Ahmadis for the next several decades, especially after Ṣādiq left and African Americans themselves became important leaders in the movement.[58]

In 1921, Ṣādiq began publishing a U.S. Ahmadiyya periodical, *The Moslem Sunrise*, which contained information about, inter alia, events concerning the Ahmadiyyas worldwide, histories of the movement, Ahmadiyya leaders' writings, prescriptions for proper Islamic practices, updates on the progress of his mission in the U.S., reprints of newspaper articles discussing Ahmadiyya activities, letters from converts and those who praised his efforts, and as many names as possible of the people who converted. Because of financial difficulties, the periodical went under in 1924, and when it was resumed it 1930, it no longer had the large amount of information concerning the converts, meaning its 1921–24 issues offer a rare detailed glimpse at the spread of the group. Not counting the individuals who converted in the detention center, thirteen people with Latina/o-type names (seven females and six males) living in the U.S. are listed among the new converts' names from 1921 to 1924, with the earliest-listed person having converted sometime during 1920.[59] The most notable of these converts were "Mr. and Mrs. Alberto" from Tampa, Florida who were praised in multiple issues for their zealous proselytizing efforts. Because there is no mention of Ṣādiq traveling to Florida, it is likely that they had read about the movement and converted via a missive sometime during the first half of 1921.[60] By the January 1922 issue, it was noted that the Albertos had converted ten people, most of whom had northern European names.[61] Sister Berket Alberto was noted for having succeeded in encouraging others to subscribe to the periodical, as well as volunteering to be an international pen pal in which the goal was to keep "aside the racial prejudices and consider . . . all as children of one God . . . to correspond on the subjects in which they are interested."[62] Brother Mubarik Alberto was one of the two Latinos whose photographs were featured in *Moslem Sunrise*.[63] It appears that there was one case of a whole family that converted: a Latina mother, an Anglo

[57] *Ibid.*, 109, 135.
[58] *Ibid.*, 123–24; Dannin, 38.
[59] *The Moslem Sunrise* 1/1 (1921): 13; 1/2 (1921): 37; 1/3 (1922): 64; 2/4 (1923): 275; 3/1 (1924): 25; 3/2 (1924): 74.
[60] *Ibid.*, 1/2 (1921): 37.
[61] *Ibid.*, 1/3 (1922): 66.
[62] *Ibid.*, 1/2 (1921): 39; 1/3 (1922): 61.
[63] *Ibid.*, 1/2 (1921): 43; 1/3 (1922): 66. My opinion, based on the admittedly crude copies of the original periodicals, is that it appears that both men were relatively light-skinned.

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father, and two Latin-type first-named daughters.[64] The other Latina/os apparently converted individually; and at least two were from New York (one of which via Chile), one was from Laredo, Texas though had converted while travelling in Toledo, Ohio where Ṣādiq had been proselytizing, and another woman was from from Pennsylvania. It is also worth remarking that in addition to these thirteen converts in the U.S., *The Moslem Sunrise* also lists in its new convert section a male convert in "Central America" and a "Shaikh Abdul Chaffar" from Tela, Honduras — the "Shaikh" title indicating that he was probably teaching Islam to others there.[65] After 1924, we hear little else of U.S. Latina/o Ahmadis.

Nation of Islam

The new practices and ideas concerning religion, race, and nationality offered by Moorish Science and the Ahmadiyyas were alternative discourses that Latina/os could use to reject or at least redefine the dominant discourses as they experienced them. Still, the discourses of these two groups made some room for "whites" to possibly be allies or at least neutral neighbors,[66] and their doctrines did not go as far as completely rejecting whites as the antithesis to their own identity. Furthermore, they did not reject the identity as U.S. citizens. However, both of these leaps were made by the Nation of Islam (NOI).

Because NOI doctrines have been repeatedly presented and analyzed by scholars, it is not necessary to present them to any significant extent here. In short, black-skinned people are direct descendents of the creative dark "atom" of the universe — they are divine, the "Original Man." With this divinity, they possess great intelligence (and so they were all "scientists"), and the Lessons of the NOI stress its teachings as being "science" and "mathematics." It was discovered by some ancient black scientists, that all blacks had two "germs" in their genetic makeup: a black one and a brown one. Sixty-six hundred years ago, a rebellious black scientist, unsatisfied with his position on earth, decided to genetically engineer the removal of, through a process of killing the darker babies, the black germ out of a group of people. Eventually he completely removed the black germ — and thus, divinity — from a group of people: whites, who, lacking divinity and therefore humanity, were "devils" and conquered, enslaved, and oppressed blacks, though the white era of rule was now coming to an end. In the process of creating whites, the scientist created the brown-, yellow-, and red-skinned people of the earth, including Asians and the indigenous people of the Americas.[67] And because these groups possessed some of the divine germ, all non-whites, including Latina/os, were, it

[64] *Ibid.*, 3/1 (1924): 25.
[65] *Ibid.*, 1/3 (1922): 65.
[66] On the Moorish position concerning "whites," see Wilson for elements of Moors' openness to whites. However, it has been reported that Noble Drew Ali orally identified whites with one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse. See Gomez, 320. Nevertheless, there seems to be some evidence that "whites" (their personal ethnic identities being somewhat uncertain) joined Moorish Science in the 1920s.
[67] Elijah Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom: Solution to the So-Called Negroes' Problem* (n.p.: Secretarius Memps Publications, 1997 [1955]).

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may be inferred, considered "Original Man" and at one point Malcolm X stated that all non-whites were "black."[68] Christianity was used to trick blacks into believing in a supernatural God instead of focusing on material conditions, thereby helping to perpetuate enslavement. Similar to that which was taught by Drew Ali, all places outside Europe are known as "Asia," though unlike in Drew Ali's doctrine, blacks are from the tribe of Shabazz — either way, however, for the NOI blacks are not true citizens of the U.S. Despite their stronger stance on separatism from the U.S. and whites up until Elijah Muhammad's death in 1975, after which the movement went through multiple changes, their demands concerning nationhood were shifting and ambiguous.[69] Finally, it is important to note that, like Moorish Science, the NOI encouraged the formation of NOI-owned and managed businesses, and had established a strong economic base by the time of the death of Elijah Muhammad.[70]

It should be pointed out that despite the apparent solidarity NOI doctrine displayed towards all "nonwhites," there was an existing feeling, at least among some mosques, that non-African Americans should not be members, including "black" Caribbeans and "Latinos."[71] C. Eric Lincoln hypothesized that "the West Indian habit of making distinctions among themselves in terms of color could jeopardize the Muslim appeal for a united black front," and so they were not encouraged to join, though there were obvious exceptions, including ministers with Caribbean heritages.[72] Still, Latina/os had been joining the NOI since at least the early-1950s.

With its condemnation of whites and the U.S., the NOI doctrine had special appeal for those who most felt the weight of the U.S.'s racial caste system: lower-class blacks. It was the poor and illiterate who flocked to the NOI.[73] The NOI had started in Detroit, Michigan in 1930; by 1934 it had around 8,000 members, including some in Chicago, and by 1959 there were a little under 30,000 nationally, including a number of mosques in the Midwest and California.[74] Because of the appeal to the lowest castes, prisoners were among the many early converts. By 1957, there were NOI communities in prisons from New York to California.[75] While some prisoners, most famously, Malcolm X, converted because of correspondences with close friends or family who had converted outside of the prison, many others were introduced to the

[68] Gomez, 349.
[69] See C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America* 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans and Africa World Press, Inc., 1994 [1961]), 79–93.
[70] Lincoln, 264.
[71] Lincoln, 25; Edward E. Curtis IV, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960–1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 85.
[72] Lincoln, 25.
[73] Erdmann Doane Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants in Detroit," *The American Journal of Sociology* 43/6 (1938): 897–99.
[74] Lincoln, 16, 103; Mosque information is according to CIA files, as published in Karl Evanzz, *The Messenger* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999), 453–4.
[75] Evanzz, 454; Knight, 160–1.

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group by fellow prisoners.[76] Like Malcolm, some were originally drawn to it because of its prospects of speeding up their time in prison — whether by somehow shortening their sentence or by making their imprisonment more bearable.[77]

The latter was the case for Piri Thomas. The Harlem-born son of Puerto Rican and Cuban parents, Thomas lived a violent and drug-filled adolescence, and in 1950, at the age of twenty-two, was sent to Comstock Prison in New York. During the next five years of his incarceration he became involved with a group of NOI members after hearing and seeing their unique practices, having a respect for their "clean-living" (the NOI followed religious and lifestyle practices similar to those mentioned above with Moorish Science), and relating to their characterization of whites as devils — but for the most part, he was willing to convert to their foreign practices and doctrines to "get the cockroaches of confusion outta my head."[78] Though he grew to become a regular practitioner and had even taken a Muslim name, Thomas stopped practicing when he left prison.[79]

Just a few years later (1957), on the opposite U.S. coast, a twenty-four-year-old Puerto Rican named Benjamin Perez became a member of an Oakland, California NOI mosque. "I saw there was a lot of knowledge in their teachings to black people. Their food was delicious. They were friendly. I liked it there and I stayed."[80] Perez was the only Latina/o NOI member in the Bay area in those early years. He would take an Islamic name, and later convert to Sunnism, becoming a travelling proselytizer, directing his message to Latina/os and Native Americans, especially those in prison.[81]

At some point, probably in the late 1950s, Tynetta Nelson (later, Tynetta Deanar Muhammad) became a member of the NOI and a secretary to Elijah Muhammad. It has been reported that she has a Latina/o-heritage connection, and can likely speak Spanish — she was the secretary who accompanied Elijah on his trips to Mexico in 1974, where, in the city of Cuernavaca, he bought a home and opened a mosque —, but little biographical information on her has been made public.[82] Tynetta has become a well-respected NOI theologian and columnist and helped establish the first NOI mosque in New York for Spanish-speakers in 1998. She gave birth to four of Elijah Muhammad's children during the 1960s, including Rasul and Ishmael (born in Albuquerque, New Mexico), who have translated NOI material into Spanish.[83] Ishmael lived and studied Islam in Cuernavaca for seventeen years before being requested by Louis Farrakhan to

[76] Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1965 [1964]), 156–70.
[77] *Ibid.*, 156.
[78] Piri Thomas, *Down These Mean Streets* as reprinted in *The Columbia Sourcebook of Muslims in the United States,* ed. E. E. Curtis (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 85–88.
[79] *Ibid.*, 92.
[80] Deborah Kong, "History Draws Hispanics to Islam," *New York Times* June 17, 2002.
[81] "Widely Sharing Love of Islam," *Islamic Horizons* (March 2010): 57.
[82] Nuri Tinaz, *Conversion of African Americans to Islam* (Ph. D. diss.: University of Warwick, 2001), 270; Evanzz, 420.
[83] Tinaz, 270; Evanzz, 451–2.

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assist the group at the Chicago headquarters. For the last several years efforts have been made to prepare the way for his succession to the head of the NOI.[84]

Edward E. Curtis's work on the NOI has brought to light a few Latino members in the 1960s, including a NOI Latino musician and a non-Muslim Latino band that was affiliated and played for the NOI.[85] Curtis reports that by the early 1970s, the NOI began to welcome "at least dozens of black Latinos into their ranks."[86] And one, Diogenes X Grassal of Harlem's Temple No. 7, wrote arguments for including Latina/os — "of African and Indian descent" — in the NOI's self-image, and he also challenged the Africa-centered focus of "black consciousness" beyond the NOI.[87] In addition, Diogenes X Grassal "established a successful mission to Latinos in the area."[88]

A number of other difficult-to-verify anecdotal accounts report of Latina/os in the pre-1975 NOI, largely concerning Latina/os in New York. These Latina/os came when the NOI's discourse's rejectionist tone of the dominant systems was perhaps the sharpest as it has been. Elijah Muhammad died in 1975 and was succeeded by his son, Warith Deen Mohammed, who molded the community into a more Sunni-oriented form. Louis Farrakhan soon broke off, absorbing followers who felt the direction the other group was taking was not focused enough around racial issues, but over the years, Farrakhan's NOI has also moved towards Sunnism.[89] However, before the 1975 shift, there was another important schism within the NOI, one that would later have a broad, if indirect, impact upon Latina/os.

Five Percenters

> *'Cause, yeah, we were beginners in the 'hood as Five Percenters . . .*
> — AZ (Anthony Cruz), from "Life's a Bitch"

Over the past fifteen or so years, hip hop has received much attention from academics who have been interested in its various cultural influences. In fact, there have been numerous writings on the influence of, among other things, Puerto Rican culture and of Islamic culture — particularly that of the Five Percent Nation.[90] This section, while

[84] Damien Amari Jackson, "EXCLUSIVE: The Nation of Islam's New Shoes," *NewsOne.com* October 29, 2008. http://newsone.com/nation/damien-jackson/exclusive-the-nation-of-islams-new-shoes/ Accessed on April 22, 2010.

[85] E. Curtis, 73 (the band Pucho and the Latin Soul Brothers), 143 (Frank 8X Lopez, whose father was from St. Kitts), 154 (Alberta 4X), 158 (LaVenia 3X), 170 (Ernesto X — the musician), and, 73, a possible Latino minister, Angelo 3X of Pensacola, FL. It should be noted that the NOI naming system adds a number in front of the "X" if another member already has that same first name, which suggests that there were several Albertas, Angelos, and LaVenias.

[86] E. Curtis, 85.

[87] *Ibid.*, 85, 91.

[88] *Ibid.*, 85.

[89] Turner, xxii.

[90] Including a whole book written on the subject. Felicia M. Miyakawa, *Five Percenter Rap: God Hop's Music* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).

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not focusing on the Latina/o-hip hop-Five Percenter connection per se, will conclude by drawing out a few interesting ties between those groups.

The Five Percent Nation is one of the many names used by a community of people who follow a "religious"-symbolic numerology and alphabet (known as "science" and "mathematics")[91] originally based off the teachings of the NOI. The main figure in its development is one Clarence Edward Smith, a former member of the NOI, from which he gained the name Clarence 13X, and popularly known to his Five Percent disciples as Allah. In the early 1960s, he had rapidly rose through the ranks of the NOI at Harlem's Temple No. 7 under Malcolm X, but began to have difficulties with other members as he reportedly started breaking their behavioral codes and questioned some of the teachings and practices. One of his central critiques was that if the blackman was the Original Man and divine, why did the NOI treat the original carrier of their message, Fard Muhammad — whose ethnic background is still uncertain, but even NOI tradition holds that his mother was white — as "Allah" and superior to others? Why was Fard, who was part "devil," given more praise than other "Gods"? After numerous run-ins with the NOI leadership, Clarence left the NOI in 1963 and, with friends, over the next year, developed a "religious"-symbolic numerology and alphabet based on some of the NOI catechism Lessons, and began gaining a following of young men in 1964.[92] The fundamental basis for their discourse is that the blackman is God, and therefore whatever he chooses is divine, and, in line with fundamental doctrines of Drew Ali and the NOI, the importance is placed not on the supernatural or hereafter but on one's current physical conditions. This meant not following any supernatural being or "mystery," including that of a long dead half-white man (Fard Muhammad) who supposedly was superior to the other blacks. "Religion" was the epitome of following a mystery, and so the Five Percenters (taking their name from a Lesson), also rejected the label of "Muslim" (though they used the term "Islam," assigning each letter a meaning).[93] Allah's message changed in many ways until his murder in 1969. At first, stressing the blackman's divinity, he allowed consumption of drugs and alcohol, as well as violence. However, he soon discouraged these things and began emphasizing "righteous" living and individual and community improvement. His position on race in the movement also changed, becoming increasingly open to non-African Americans. After he died, the teachings were taken in several different directions, though generally forming around individual and community improvement.[94]

Latina/os were involved in the movement from an early stage. One story holds that when Allah was incarcerated in Bellevue mental hospital in 1965 (where he was placed because of him "ranting and raving" — presumably, proudly describing his Five

[91] McCloud, 60.

[92] See Yusuf Nuruddin, "The Five Percenters: A Teenage Nation of Gods and Earths" in *Muslim Communities in North America,* eds. Y. Y. Haddad and J. Smith (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 113–4; Knight, 32–54.

[93] McCloud, 60.

[94] Cf. Knight.

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Percenter worldview — while in court), he gained new disciples, including an Armando X from Harlem's NOI Temple No. 7.[95] Throughout these early years, other "Gods" (a title for Five Perecenters) sought out Latina/o converts, primarily Puerto Ricans, who were often called "Power Rules," following the "religious"-symbolic alphabet's application to "P.R."[96] Early Puerto Rican Gods included Sha Sha, who was assigned the task of sharing the teachings with Native Americans, and Kendu Islam who not only was appointed to pull the lever for Allah's casket to be cremated in 1969, also is reported to have brought the teachings to Puerto Rico.[97] Because of the teachings' foundations in NOI doctrine which focused on the superior divinity of African-Americans (who comprised the majority of the Gods), and because individuals were given much freedom (based on their natural divinity) in how they could understand the teachings, it is reported that some lighter-skinned African Americans and Latina/os in the group faced some discrimination, though they generally were accepted.[98]

The influence of Five Percenter teachings on hip hop is now well known,[99] but I would like to point out two early connections with Latina/os: It is widely known that Big Daddy Kane, who was a God, was very influential on hip hop during the late 1980s and early 1990s, and often laced his recordings with references to the teachings. However, few have noted that Kane, born Antonio Monterio Hardy, was of Puerto Rican descent, and being born in 1968 Brooklyn, was introduced to the Fiver Percent Nation in its earlier years. In 1972, Anthony Cruz (rap name: AZ) was born to a Dominican father and African-American mother. Also growing up in Brooklyn and having been introduced to the Five Percenters in their earlier years, AZ came to prominence in 1994 with the sole guest verse on the song "Life's a Bitch" on Nas' (Nasir Jones) highly praised (and eventually high-selling, with over one million units shipped) *Illmatic* album.[100] Both Nas and AZ had been exposed to the Five Percenters, who AZ name-dropped in his famous verse (quoted above). It is also interesting to note that *Illmatic* actually starts off with an audio clip from one of the earliest movies about hip hop: *Wild Style* (1983). The clip is of a dialogue between "Zoro," a fictionalized characterization of the actor himself — a Puerto Rican-American graffiti artist Lee Quinones — and his unnamed brother (an actor named Carlos Morales). This demonstrates an example of the closeness between the identities of hip hop, African Americans, Latina/os, and Islam. The Islam-*Illmatic* connection actually goes beyond that of the Five Percenters: the album samples a record

[95] Knight, 72.
[96] *Ibid.*, 85, 226.
[97] *Ibid.*, 122, 226; Nuruddin, 128.
[98] Knight, 226.
[99] See the writings by Hisham Aidi; Maldonado; Turner, xxv-xxix; and Suad Abdul Khabeer, "*Rep that Islam*: The Rhyme and Reason of American Islamic Hip Hop," *Muslim World* 97 (2007): 125–41.
[100] For an example of the respect given to *Illmatic*, consider the praises given in *Born to Use Mics: Reading Nas's* Illmatic. *Illmatic* is the subject of the first book "in a series on great albums," edited by Michael Eric Dyson and Sohail Daulatzai. Sohail Daulatzai, "Introduction: *Illmatic*: It Was Written," in *Born to Use Mics: Reading Nas's* Illmatic, eds. M. E. Dyson and S. Daulatzai (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2009), 3.

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by Ahmad Jamal, an African-American Muslim convert, and the outro of the song featuring AZ is a cornet solo played by Nas' father, Olu Dara, also an African-American Muslim. Scholars have noted that African-American musicians have been converting to Islam since the 1940s, and while they were first largely influenced by the Ahmadis, some, like Jamal, later became Sunnis.[101] And as we will see, a number of U.S. Latina/os came to Islam prior to 1980 directly through connections with Sunni African Americans.

African-American-majority Sunni groups

Scholars have shown evidence that African Americans have been converting to Sunni Islam as early as the 1920s, and probably earlier in the 20th century,[102] though, as I mentioned above, we know very little about Latina/os who joined the earliest of these groups.[103] One of the most important early figures concerning African-American Sunnis is Sheikh Al-Haj Daoud Ahmed Faisal, said to be an immigrant from Trinidad.[104] Shaikh Faisal reportedly established a mosque in Brooklyn, which was by the 1960s popularly known as the State Street Mosque, probably around the late 1920s.[105] His mosque was attended by immigrant Muslims of a variety of nationalities, but the majority of the

[101] For example, Talib Dawud. See Dannin, 58.

[102] There are at least three possible early routes: the Sudanese proselytizer Satti Majid (see note 36); a number of small African-American groups in New York (see, for example, Aminah Beverly McCloud, *African American Islam* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 10); and the Punjabi immigrants in California, a handful of whom, including Muslims, married African-American women. See Leonard, 67–9. However, that any of these women converted to Islam is at best a speculation and odds are against it, considering the fact that of the over 200 Mexican-American women who married these Punjabis (10% of whom were Muslim), Leonard is only aware of one who definitely converted to Islam (see pages 30, 67, 130).

[103] There is evidence of interethnic marriage among some early African-American Sunni groups, for example at the First Cleveland Mosque (see Turner, 140), but more research is needed to determine if Latina/os were part of these.

[104] However, while the majority of scholars report this, some people who met the man claimed he was probably born in America. For example, see Nadim Makdisi, "The Moslems of America," *Christian Century* August 26, 1959, 970. This was also pointed out by Maryam Jameelah, an important white convert in the early 1960s, who spent considerable time at Faisal's mosque. There, she became close to Faisal's wife, Khadija, who Jameelah knew was indeed from the West Indies. See Maryam Jameelah, *Quest for Truth* (Delhi: Aakif Book Depot, 1992 [1989]), 161–63 for an interesting first-hand account of Faisal's mosque in the early 1960s. After reviewing all available evidence, Muhammed Al-Ahari, who has re-published Faisal's writings, says there is no conclusive evidence for either assertion: "Introduction by the Editor," in Sheikh Daoud Faisal, *Islam: The True Faith, the Religion of Humanity. The Works of Hajj Shaykh Daoud Ahmed Faisal* vol. I (Chicago: Magribine Press, 2006), 8.

[105] Sheikh Daoud Faisal noted it being 1928 in *Islam: The True Faith: The Religion of Humanity* (Brooklyn: Islamic Mission of America, 1965), 97. This is confirmed by Al-Ahari, who adds that in 1928 the mosque was called the Islamic Propagation Center of America, 7. Other scholars, however, list different times for the actual occupation and/or beginning of the State Street Mosque. For earlier dates, see McCloud, 22; for later ones, see, for example, Marc Ferris, "To 'Achieve the Pleasure of Allah': Immigrant Muslims in New York City 1893–1991," in *Muslim Communities in North America,* eds. Y. Y. Haddad and J. Smith (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 212.

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congregation was, until around the early 1980s, African-American.[106] However, while Faisal's message was largely directed to African Americans, including those in prison and apparently those who had been members of the NOI and Moorish Science,[107] stressing the idea that in Islam there exists no racism and rejecting the term "negro" as incorrect,[108] he also spent considerable time building alliances with local Muslim immigrants, Muslim leaders in other countries, and in campaigning to the United Nations to promote peace and economic security among all of humanity.[109] In the early 1960s, some of the African American members of the mosque, influenced by a *Tabligh Jamaat* teacher there as well as a general growing racial consciousness among African Americans at the time, felt that Faisal was not doing enough to help the material conditions of African Americans. This group began meeting independently in 1962 under the name of Dar ul-Islam. As racial tensions increased throughout the U.S., culminating in 1967/68, the group, which had many former black power movement members,[110] became strongly motivated and began vigorous proselytization, quickly spreading throughout the U.S., focusing on African-American community improvement, though in line with the *Tabligh*, remained apolitical.[111] Jane I. Smith reports that Alianza Islamica (est. 1975), which is probably the first Latina/o Muslim organization in the U.S., emerged as an "outgrowth" of the Dar ul-Islam.[112]

Two years after the Dar ul-Islam first developed their independent, African-American-centered, but apolitical identity, Malcolm X, after breaking with the NOI, announced the establishment of a politically-focused organization for all U.S. African-Americans (the Organization of Afro-American Unity) and a Sunni-oriented Islamic center, Muslim Mosque, Inc., which, however, ended operations when Malcolm died the following year.[113] Despite its short existence, several individuals joined, including a Shaykh Tawfiq, of mixed Native American and African-American ancestry. Tawfiq served as its secretary, earning a scholarship to study Islam at Al-Azhar University in Cairo where he gained a strong nationalistic and more political leaning.[114] He returned

[106] See McCloud, 22–24 and Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf, "Structural Adaptations in an Immigrant Muslim Community," in *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration,* eds. R. S. Warner and J. G. Wittner (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 235–61.

[107] His organization's "Certificate of Heritage" indicated that it was created "For people of African-Asian slave ancestors of American birth" — the "Asian" reference probably indicates his recognition of and respect for how pervasive among local African Americans was the belief in the doctrine that Africa was once part of Asia. Faisal, *Works*, 14; R. M. Mukhtar Curtis notes Faisal's work in prisons in "Urban Muslims: The Formation of the Dar ul-Islam Movement," in *Muslim Communities in North America,* eds. Y. Y. Haddad and J. Smith (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 54.

[108] Faisal, *Islam,* 8, 96B.

[109] Dannin, 63–66; Faisal, *Islam*, 16.

[110] McCloud, 70.

[111] R.M. Curtis, 54–65.

[112] Jane I. Smith, *Islam in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 67.

[113] X and Haley, 316–21.

[114] Malcolm X, during his trips to in Muslim world, reportedly obtained twenty scholarships for African-American Muslims to study at al-Azhar. See Gomez, 364.

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and in 1967 established the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood, promoting the establishment of a separate Muslim community, prison *da'wa*, and drug rehabilitation.[115] As Robert Dannin explains:

> In 1976 he set up the "Living Islamic Community" program with a housing development based on the city's sweat equity program for restoring blighted residential housing. He always urged the Muslim brothers to get involved politically, to run for the school boards and speak out at community board meetings.[116]

The Community had around 100 families, twenty percent of which were Latina/os, though little has been written about their personal lives.[117]

In nearby Washinton, D.C., two years after Tawfiq established his organization, Yusuf Muzaffaruddin Hamid, an African American who had converted to Islam a number of years earlier, returned to the U.S. from a sojourn in the Middle East where he had studied under various revivalist groups and at the University of Medina.[118] Upon his return, Hamid took a job in the book store at the Islamic Center in Washington, D.C. There, he and other African-American Muslims became frustrated over the Center's lack of *da'wa* to African Americans and formed their own community mosque near Howard University.[119] There, Hamid was elected the imam, and the group, like Dar ul-Islam and Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood, began a zealous program of proselytization to African Americans and Latina/os, organized under the name of Islamic Party in North America (IPNA). Many members were professionals, others devoted their lives to the movement, making and selling jewelry in the street. Their mosque contained barracks in which unmarried Muslim men would bunk. Among these men was Khalil Abdul Karim, "a former member of the New York-based Latino activist group, the 'Young Lords'," who was first introduced to Islam by IPNA.[120] IPNA soon spread to other states, including New York and, in 1973, to Houston, Texas which would become its southwest regional headquarters. Several Latina/os started joining the movement, and from 1974–77 many even moved to D.C. to be closer to the national headquarters. Among those making their *hijra* (Islamic migration), were Umar Abdur Rahim Ocasio, who would later become an imam of Alianza Islamica, and his wife, Faiza. Ocasio described the experience of many Latina/o Muslims at this time, especially those who had immigrated to New York from Puerto Rico:

> Latino Muslims encountered an interesting new world upon their conversions. Any lingering parochialism was shattered by the experience of suddenly being exposed

[115] Dannin, 68–69.
[116] *Ibid.*, 69.
[117] *Ibid.*
[118] McCloud, 64.
[119] Khalid Fattah Griggs, "Islamic Party in North America: A Quiet Storm of Political Activism," in *Muslim Minorities in the West,* Y. Y. Haddad and J. Smith (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2002), 83–4.
[120] Griggs, 84–85, 93.

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> to many different peoples and cultures in New York's varied Islamic tapestry . . . Yet curiously, it seemed Latinos believed it was essential to obliterate all vestiges of their ancestral heritage. Dressed in turbans and robes, they would even refrain from speaking Spanish in the *masjid* . . . The Islamic Party was a little different . . . But, still not all of the reservations to practice the elements of our culture that were consistent with Islamic teachings were removed when we migrated to D.C. Some party brothers were more receptive to our Latino identity than others. The 18th Street and Columbia Road North West area was fertile for *da'wa* for us due to the large numbers of Latinos. Mostly though, we sort of tried to blend in with everyone else."[121]

As the ranks of Latina/o Muslims quickly grew, inspired by the nationalist, community-help orientation of these various African-American Muslim movements, the Alianza Islamic was established in 1975 in Harlem with similar goals, but focused on the Latina/o community. Another future leader of Alianza was an IPNA alum, Yahya Figuero, but other members of Alianza would be drawn from beyond the ranks of the African-American Muslim groups.[122] Alianza would go onto become influential for many more U.S. Latina/o Islamic groups which followed.[123]

Conclusion

Whether or not the idea that African Americans were the U.S. group most attracted to Islam in the 20th century as a result of having faint cultural memories of an African-Islamic past will ever be fully agreed upon,[124] what is clear is that African Americans, having been relegated to the lowest ends of the U.S. social structure, had the least to lose by rejecting the dominant discourses. Latina/os, on the other hand, whose position in the U.S. caste structure was much more ambiguous, whose awareness of cultural connections to an Islamic heritage was probably even less than that of African Americans, and who had a nearby thriving cultural world from which they could easily (relative to African Americans) draw, might not have been as eager, as a group, to reject and/or redefine the dominant discourses. In addition, their relatively smaller numbers in the eastern U.S. where these African-American Islamic movements were mainly centered also ensured that their exposure to Islam would be less. Those who did convert to these groups, then — and particularly those with lighter skin — were individuals who, it seems, were willing to deny themselves the potential privileges of emphasizing their closeness to the dominant discourses. Furthermore, by joining these groups, often as "blacks," perhaps because they were bringing with them the more fluid concepts of race found in Latin America, these early Latina/o Muslims helped challenge and redefine a

[121] As quoted in Griggs, 97.
[122] Griggs, 97; Hisham Aidi, "Ole to Allah," *IslamForToday.com* http://www.islamfortoday.com/ole.htm Accessed on: April 23, 2010.
[123] Juan Galvan, "FAQs About the LADO Group," *The Latino Muslim Voice* (January-March 2007). http://www.latinodawah.org/newsletter/jan-mar2k7.html Accessed on: April 23, 2010.
[124] An idea suggested by Turner, but rejected by Sherman Jackson in *Islam and the Blackamerican* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 18, 123.

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discourse which had led to so much violence and oppression in the U.S. Finally, these Latina/os, in choosing a religion, racial identities, nationalities, senses of self, and economic practices divergent from the norms of their cultures of origin, were in fact expanding the very meaning of the word "Latino."

The year 1975 was a crucial one for U.S. converts to Islam: It was still during the early years of the international Islamic revival; the latest mass influx of Muslim immigrants was just beginning to reshape Islamic culture in the U.S.; and Elijah Muhammad died, precipitating a major shift for the direction of African-American Muslims, not only in the NOI's large transition to Sunnism, but also in their new approach to race (the first white convert to the NOI joined that year).[125] These events would have a major impact on the Islam of African Americans.[126] For U.S. Latina/os, who were continuing to experience ever-growing immigration to the U.S., these factors also meant a change in how most would start coming to Islam and what kind of Islam they would have. The development of Alianza Islamica that year is symbolic of the change for Latina/o Muslims: becoming a group large enough, and with enough self-confidence to start to become independent. So while African-American Muslim connections are still important for bringing Latina/os to Islam and in the development of new Muslim communities, their relative impact has lessened.[127] By the early 1980s, a new chapter in the history of U.S. Latina/o Muslims was developing.

[125] Paul Delaney, "Black Muslims Will End Longtime Ban on Whites," *New York Times* June 17, 1975; Barbara Reynolds, "First White Woman Becomes a Muslim," *Chicago Tribune* March 2, 1976.
[126] Sherman Jackson, 59–61.
[127] See Bowen, "Narratives."

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