Mystery of the Moorish Science Temple: Southern Blacks and American Alternative Spirituality in 1920s Chicago

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In 1926, the well-known black scholar Ira De Augustine Reid complained that storefront churches were “a general nuisance. Neither their appearance nor their character warrants the respect of the community.” Mortified, he described the founders of these informal assemblies: “He conducts his services on such days as he feels disposed mentally and indisposed financially. To this gentleman of the cloth . . . the church is a legitimate business.” More to the point, he described his perception of the many southern migrants who aspired to found their own churches and religions, recounting how one “young swain” had announced to the leadership of a large traditional black congregation that he had had a dream. “In this dream a still small voice told him to ‘G. P. C.’ and when he heard it he knew that he was instructed to ‘Go Preach Christ.’ After further questioning by the council, the chairman told him that he had misinterpreted his dream, for it certainly meant ‘Go plant corn.”’ For many educated African Americans, the idea of southern migrants presuming to enjoy their own religious traditions on their own terms in the urban North was ludicrous.

Early observers of the Moorish Science Temple of America were similarly suspicious of the success of this movement founded by a southern migrant in Chicago. Interwar academics and journalists investigated this religion, in the late 1920s one of the most well-known alternative black religious groups in the United States, only to throw up their hands and declare Moorish Science an unexplainable hodgepodge of beliefs, a cult built on religious “hokum” and the gullible desperation of simple rural blacks lost in the big city. More than fifty years later, the venerable scholar of African American religion, C. Eric Lincoln, similarly wrote that Moorish Science was “essentially a mélange of Black Nationalism and Christian revivalism with an awkward, confused admixture of the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad,” promoted by the uneducated for the uneducated. At no point did Lincoln
Figure 1. Moorish Americans in Chicago in 1928; from the Chicago Defender.
ask why such a “mélange” of supposedly mixed-up beliefs appealed to the many southerners in Chicago who converted to Moorish Science. Perhaps he assumed these believers were simply too unsophisticated to resist the charisma of the religion’s prophet, Noble Drew Ali.

Seventy-five years after it emerged in Chicago, the origin of Moorish Science is still a long-standing puzzle of American religious history. In much of the literature on the faith, including that by Lincoln, there is an overwhelming focus on the Moors’ black nationalist teachings, an approach that reduces believers’ motivations to anti-white sentiment and does not give them credit as sincerely spiritual people. More sympathetic authors, such as Richard Turner and Amina McCloud, have further been swayed by Ali’s use of the term “Islam” to describe his teachings. However, since, in the early days, Moorish Science in no way resembled scriptural Islam or the beliefs and practices of Muslims, these authors are forced automatically to pose Ali’s religion as a problem to be justified or explained away if the Moors are to be considered “legitimate” Muslims. A number of scholars proceed, for instance, to use classical Arabic terminology to describe the Moors’ actions or ideas since they operate under the assumption that Moorish Science was somehow Muslim in spirit, despite all outward appearances or the Western Gnostic nature of Ali’s teachings. In the last ten years, this type of retroactive Islamization has grown into a form of scholarly political correctness that Macaela di Leonardo has nicely termed “anthropological antimodernism.” Grounded in a romantic perception of Islam as somehow more authentic or spiritually legitimate than indigenous American new religions, the anthropological antimodernist streak in African American Islamic studies has surfaced here as a sort of Islamocentric analysis that credits all innovation and knowledge to “Islam”—a term these authors never define but to which they nonetheless ascribe agency independent of human action or interpretation. This approach, when applied to the Moors, is ultimately unsatisfying since it neglects the overwhelming direct evidence Noble Drew Ali left us in his writings and his actions that his influences were not Muslim but rather distinctly American.

The Moors’ success was due precisely to their ability to speak to African Americans’ desire for an innovative alternative spirituality grounded in local religious culture. Highlighting contemporary black investigations of non-Western religions, the Moors were partly a product of and partly further inspiration to the vibrant experimental religious scene of interwar Chicago. Acknowledging the problems inherent in labels, Moorish Science is most accurately described as a black Spiritualist-style religion steeped in the philosophies of mysti-
cal Freemasonry. The Moorish Science Temple was also among the first African American religious movements to identify itself as “Moslem.” Only by examining the rich local context of ideas and beliefs that gave Moorish Science meaning in the 1920s can we understand how such a religion came to exist in interwar Chicago. We must take seriously the motivations of the rank-and-file Moors who adopted a faith that can appear so unintelligible to outsiders. Indeed, if Moorish Science had seemed as perplexing to the working-class southerners who joined the religion as it has to the journalists and scholars who have wondered about it, Noble Drew Ali would not have converted a single soul.

The Moorish prophet Noble Drew Ali had been drawn to the rich popular intellectual scene that developed in the black storefront churches and “street universities” of the urban North during and after the Great Migration. There a significant number of people found meaning in Ali’s words, building a nationwide movement with Moorish Science Temples in a dozen cities, a card-carrying membership of
at least three thousand nationwide, and no doubt a considerably larger number of sympathizers. The Moors pragmatically put their beliefs into action by publishing a newspaper, running their own businesses, lobbying for political candidates, and developing a prominent if ephemeral national public profile. Noble Drew Ali’s death and surveillance by police and the FBI finally drove the movement to become increasingly introverted and critical of the American government in the 1930s and 1940s.

But before this, in his late 1920s heyday, Noble Drew Ali self-published his revelation, *The Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple*. Ali introduces his work by explaining that the Koran’s stories of Jesus’ mystical life in Tibet, India, and Egypt, its revisionist black history, and its instructions for divine day-to-day living are not new. Rather, he states that the Koran contains ancient truths held secret by the Muslims of India, Egypt, and Palestine but now revealed to African Americans through their prophet, Noble Drew Ali. When the prophet explained that his ideas were not new, he was not lying. In fact, he borrowed much of this scripture from earlier texts well known in black and white American mystical circles. No scholars seem to have noticed Ali’s plagiarism until the 1940s, when academics at the Hartford Theological Seminary accidentally identified his writings as having been borrowed almost entirely from two other works. It is fortunate that Noble Drew Ali did not fancy himself to be a great writer; as a result, the sources of Ali’s inspiration are explicitly clear because he copied these texts word-for-word, page-by-page, with few changes.

The first half of the Koran came from *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*, first published in 1907. This work is one in a long tradition of apocrypha describing Jesus as a mystical figure, only one of a number of “Christs” in world history. The Aquarian Gospel was very influential in the first three decades of the twentieth century among both black Spiritualists and white believers in Gnostic spirituality or New Thought who understood Jesus’ miracles, not as the work of God, but as evidence of his ability to tap into his own divine essence. Many perceived Jesus as a profound example of a degree of perfection that all men and women could strive for through examination of the wisdom of mystical brotherhoods which dated back to the ancient Holy Land and Egypt. The white author of the Aquarian Gospel, Levi Dowling, professed to having received a number of revelations through a process known as automatic writing, whereby one could extract information from the Akashic records. Known alternatively as “divine substance” or “the Book of God’s Remembrances,” American mystics understood the Akashic records as evidence of the unity of all humankind and an invisible chronicle of every human
thought and deed from the beginning of time. Levi’s readings of the Akashic records emphasized the divinity of each person and foretold a day when all men would shed their human bodies and take on a spiritual form. He communicated this message by way of a retelling of the lost years of Jesus Christ. The New Testament does not account for the eighteen years of Jesus’ life between the ages of twelve and thirty. Dowling’s work addressed this omission and presented an alternative history whereby Jesus travels during these lost years through Egypt, India, and Tibet, gaining invaluable spiritual wisdom from Buddhists, Hindus, and scholars of “Egyptian Mystery Schools.” Upon discovering how to overcome his human self, Jesus returns to the Holy Land where he is persecuted, then crucified. Afterward, he appears in Asia and Africa to revisit his teachers and disciples in his spiritual form and to promise that each human will someday discover his or her own divinity and be reborn as spirit, one with God.

Ali engaged in this tradition of the mystical Jesus by adapting Dowling’s Jesus to his own conception of human nature and the black community he sought to serve. Copying numerous chapters from the *Aquarian Gospel*, Ali changed all references from “God” to “Allah,” choosing to use the Arabic word that, though it holds the same meaning, may have seemed more authentic to him. The prophet must have seen himself described in the first pages of the *Aquarian Gospel*, where Eva S. Dowling, Levi’s wife, reprinted another of her husband’s manuscripts, “Cusp of the Ages,” in which Levi proclaimed,

> This age will be an age of splendor and of light, because it is the home age of the Holy Breath; and Holy Breath will testify anew for Christ, the Logos of eternal Love.

> At first of every age this Logos is made manifest in flesh so man can see and know and comprehend a Love that is not narrow, circumscribed.

Dowling called “Cusp of the Ages” his “commission” as the new Christ. Noble Drew Ali may have interpreted these words as an articulation of his own divine revelation. Although he plagiarized the *Aquarian Gospel*, Ali probably did not discover his calling as a prophet while reading Dowling’s work. Rather, Ali likely conceived of himself as such at some earlier point, perhaps seeing the *Aquarian Gospel* as a previously misinterpreted text that actually foretold of his own life. Filled with a sense of prophetic mission, the words “Christ, Logos of eternal Love” spoke to Ali’s belief in a coming age of African American renewal, of “splendor and of light,” with himself as Logos, channel for the Holy Breath. Indeed, in the Moorish catechism, “Koran Questions for Moorish Children,” Ali describes himself as “Allah’s
Prophet." Question number six asks, "What is a prophet?" The answer: "a Thought of Allah manifested in flesh," echoing Dowling's Christ-Logos, "made manifest in flesh," above.\(^2\)

Ali found more truth contained in Dowling's reading of the Akashic records. Chapter One of the Koran, taken from a section of the Gospel entitled "Man," mirrored Ali's explanation for the perceived sorry state of African American society. Dowling spoke of such suffering as a necessary state that would trigger divine self-transformation spiritually and physically because "spirit-man, as seed of God, held deep within himself the attributes of every part of God."\(^2\) Ali placed this explanation at the beginning of the Holy Koran to contextualize the story of Jesus' illumination and transformation and to explain to his converts why urban black culture seemed marked by family breakdown, poverty, and discrimination. Ali, borrowing from Dowling, advised Moorish Americans,

> Without a foe a soldier never knows his strength, and thought must be developed by the exercise of strength. . . . But man will regain his lost estate, his heritage; but he must do it in a conflict that cannot be told in words. . . . When man has conquered carnal things his garb of flesh will then have served its purpose well and it will fall; will be no more.\(^2\)

Noble Drew Ali saw the "higher self," or soul, as the divine essence within each person. The lesson of Moorish Science was to enable one's higher self to conquer the carnal or lower self in order to experience peace and abundance in life. Within the context of 1920s black Chicago, with its vice districts, gambling houses, unemployment, and racial tensions, Ali's metaphor of the overcoming of the lower, carnal self presented a way for blacks to raise themselves above a difficult situation.

Ali then turns his attention to the main body of Dowling's Aquarian Gospel, which details Jesus' life and travels in Africa and Asia. Dowling's Jesus visits Asian and African lands, in each place learning secret wisdom and winning pupils of his own, including the Indian "Prince Ravanna," a character who resembles the many self-styled Indian princes and spiritualist advisors who toured America in the 1920s.\(^2\) Dowling's rendition of the mystical Asian journeys of Jesus rang true to Ali's conceptions of the unity of all nonwhites in knowledge of a universal wisdom that African Americans had temporarily forgotten. Borrowing from Dowling, Ali's Koran described Jesus' appearance, "fully materialized," to his old teachers and students around the world to whom he proclaimed,

> The problem of the ages has been solved; a son of man has risen from the dead; has shown that human flesh can be transmuted into flesh divine. . . . To you I come, the first of all the race to be
Islam or Mohammedanism
Meaning the Religion of Peace
It was the religion of Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed and of your forefathers.
Service every Sunday morning at 10 o'clock.
Sermon for this Sunday is the Mohammed interpretation of
"Love Thy Enemy"
Come and Hear—You Will Enjoy It—Free Location, 4448 Wabash Ave.

Figure 3. Ahmadiyya announcement from the "Where to Worship" page of the Chicago Defender.

transmuted to the image of Allah. What I have done, all men will do; and what I am, all men will be.27

Did Moors believe that all African Americans could literally rise from the dead? Perhaps, though most probably saw the crucifixion and resurrection from a black Spiritualist perspective, which differs from the traditional Christian interpretation by arguing Jesus achieved perfection, not by the work of God, but through mystical realization of his own divine potential.28 Similarly, Ali interpreted African Americans’ ignorance of their identity and heritage as a state of spiritual death from which they could transform themselves into more successful, content people through the mysteries of Moorish Science.

Much of the knowledge Jesus had needed lay in the lands of Asia. Here lies a connection between the mystical Jesus, American alternative spirituality, and certain Indian Muslims which is instructive if we are to understand all the religious ideas Ali’s converts had available, and with which Ali had to contend, even if he chose not to espouse them himself. Since 1920, one Ahmadiyya Muslim missionary, Muhammad Sadiq, had been operating a mosque and small newspaper on South Wabash Avenue in Chicago near where most Moors lived and worked. In the late 1950s, Charles Braden noted that Sadiq’s successors were distributing a pamphlet, The Tomb of Jesus, to argue Jesus had not been the son of God but rather one in a line of prophets that had culminated in the Ahmadi prophet, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad.29 In a similar vein as the Aquarian Gospel, this work detailed the belief that Jesus had survived crucifixion and lived for another few decades in India. And, in fact, there is a saint shrine in Srinagar today at which Muslims pay their respects to a Saint Issa, namely Jesus Christ. Unlike many other Muslims, the Ahmadiyya refute not only the Christian belief in the unique divinity of Jesus but also the common Muslim interpretation of a Qur’anic passage that holds that Jesus survived crucifixion to be drawn up into heaven by God until his return—in
human form—on judgment day. The Ahmadiyya may have believed that their interpretation of the story of Jesus would facilitate American conversions to their formulation of Islamic belief and practice among those dabbling in Gnostic religion or Eastern spirituality. Consequently, The Tomb of Jesus referred to two books, La Vie Inconnu de Jesus Christ, by Russian explorer Nicholas Notovitch, and the Rosicrucian work, The Mystical Life of Jesus, by H. Spencer Lewis, as Western-authored corroborating evidence for their story of Jesus.

Though Dowling made no reference to it, in all probability his Aquarian Gospel was inspired by or borrowed from La Vie Inconnu de Jesus Christ. Claiming to have visited a remote Tibetan monastery in the 1880s, the author, Notovitch, published a French translation of what he believed were Pali manuscripts translated by monks there which told of a Saint Issa, or Jesus, who had come from the West many centuries earlier. Published in 1890, this book had in common with much Jesus apocrypha a story explaining the work as the product of travel to the exotic mystical lands of Asia to find ancient wisdom previously overlooked or suppressed by conventional Christian theologians. Knowing the many traditions of the mystical Jesus alive and well in the United States, the Ahmadiyya here focused their missionary activity on Americans who were familiar with these books, including Chicago’s booming population of black Spiritualists. Indeed, in a 1930 edition of the Ahmadiyya paper, the Moslem Sunrise, editors advertised speeches by Ahmadi leader Sufi M. Bengalee at a number of Chicago’s Spiritualist churches, though it is not clear if these were white or black Spiritualist. Moreover, a few Ahmadi converts were also active in Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association, from whence came many of Ali’s followers after the collapse of Garvey’s American membership in the mid-1920s. Certainly, many of Ali’s converts were aware of the mystical Jesus, either as former Garveyites, black Spiritualists, or from personal exposure to Ahmadi proselytizing in Chicago, and may have found no contradiction between Ali’s mystical understanding of Jesus and the name of Islam.

Ali continued his lessons of mystical self-help with the second half of the Holy Koran, which contained practical rules for daily living and happy relationships with family, friends, employers, and politicians. The source of these teachings was yet another book associated with Gnostic religion and American mystery schools, a book called Unto Thee I Grant. This text purports to contain very ancient wisdom translated from manuscripts found in Tibet in the early eighteenth century. In a tale strikingly reminiscent of those surrounding Notovitch’s discovery of Pali manuscripts, the publishers of a 1925 edition of Unto Thee I Grant recount in the book’s preface the story of
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an English gentleman commissioned by wealthy patrons to explore Asia. In China, he discovers translations of Tibetan manuscripts that local scholars claimed to have rescued from a number of Tibetan monasteries, "to prevent their being totally lost."37 The Chinese translators speculated on the identity of the manuscripts' author, suggesting perhaps Confucius or some other prominent Asian thinker. However, the preface goes on to present its own legend, which places the manuscripts in Egypt between 1360 and 1350 B.C.E. where they were written by Pharaoh Amenhotep IV. Amenhotep is famous in Western mystical and Masonic folklore as the founder of the first great school of mysticism. The preface elaborates on Amenhotep's legacy to the world: "Reference to any encyclopedia will reveal the fact that this Pharaoh upset the priesthood teachings and idol worship of Egypt by the establishment of a monotheistic, mystical religion, and every authority on the history of religions points to him as the first man in the civilized world to proclaim the belief in one God."38 This is quite an accomplishment indeed; however, such a popular intellectual tradition was based less on reality than on the contemporary popular Egyptology favored by its publishers, the Ancient and Mystical Order of the Rosae Crucis.

The Rosicrucians, as they are usually called, probably emerged in sixteenth-century Europe, though they claim a history of mystical pursuit that stretches back to that secret brotherhood founded by Amenhotep IV. Best defined as a Gnostic mystery school, the Rosicrucians share with black Spiritualists a fascination with esoteric wisdom, magic, and personal transformation.39 Presenting another version of the common tale of mystical Asian travel, the mythical founder of the Rosicrucian order, Christian Rosencreuz, was believed to have discovered his secrets while traveling in the Middle East. The most prominent white American Rosicrucian, H. Spencer Lewis, similarly recounted in The Mystical Life of Jesus his search for esoteric traditions of Jesus in the Holy Land and Egypt. The American branch of the Rosicrucian order, the Ancient and Mystical Order of the Rosae Crucis, or AMORC, has been publishing a wide variety of books on mystical topics since the early 1920s, including Unto Thee I Grant.40 This book was also available during the 1920s under the title Infinite Wisdom from the de Laurence Company of Chicago, which placed large advertisements in the national edition of the black weekly Chicago Defender and apparently had plenty of African American customers, many of them Spiritualists.41 The fact that these books were written by whites seems not to have detracted from their esoteric value and thus their perceived origins in the nonwhite lands of ancient Egypt or mysterious India. Indeed, many black Spiritualists un-
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understood their wisdom to transcend race and the physical body, both using white-authored texts and taking on white clients themselves. 42

Ali was drawn to the teachings of Unto Thee I Grant not only because of their apparent origin in ancient Egypt but also because the practical, though patriarchal, advice it contained catered to conservative 1920s perceptions that the urban black community was in a state of disrepair. For instance, Ali plagiarized two sections of Unto Thee entitled “Husband” and “Son,” reworked in the Holy Koran as “Duty of a Husband” and “The Obedience of Children Towards Their Father” respectively. 43 From Unto Thee Ali compiled “Holy Instruction and Warnings for All Young Men,” namely, “Beware, young man, beware of all the allurements of wantonness, and let not the harlot tempt thee to excess in her delights. . . . The kisses of her mouth are sweeter than honey; the perfumes of Arabia breathe from her lips.” 44 The prophet used Unto Thee to describe the power of the good Moorish American woman: “The care of her family is her whole delight; to that alone she applieth her study; and elegance with frugality is seen in her mansion. . . . She speaketh, and the servants fly; she pointeth, and the thing is done; for the law of love is in their hearts, and her kindness addeth wings to their feet.” 45 Such teachings implied Moors should enjoy a high standard of living, contrasting sharply with the actual economic situation of most believers, perhaps giving many Moors hope for greater wealth in the future and more faith in the prophet’s ideas. Ali further invited Moors to know their link to nonwhites worldwide, using chapters from Unto Thee such as “Brothers,” which became “A Holy Covenant of the Asiatic Nation.” 46 These chapters, like those borrowed from the Aquarian Gospel, were again used word-for-word with minor revisions only, such as the use of “Allah” instead of “God.”

One chapter in particular is intriguing since Ali’s purpose in including it, when he omitted other chapters of Unto Thee, is difficult to understand. Ali used a chapter entitled “Masters and Servants,” renaming it “Holy Instructions from the Prophet, Masters and Servants.” The chapter opens with the following words:

Repine not, O man, at the state of servitude; it is the appointment of Allah, and hath many advantages; it removeth thee from cares and solicitudes in life.

The honor of a servant is his fidelity; his highest virtues are submission and obedience.

Be patient, therefore, under the reproofs of thy master; and when he rebuketh thee, answer not again. The silence of thy resignation shall not be forgotten. 47

One could argue that many African Americans would perceive these words as an espousal of accommodation to whites. Indeed, those Moors
who irritated the prophet and police by accosting whites in the street and preaching at the workplace ignored this portion of Ali’s Koran. Ali may have included this passage in his work specifically for them, as incidents between militant Moors, whites, and police were occurring just as the prophet prepared to publish his revelation. Still, Ali was not alone in perceiving culture rather than race as the source of inequality and was adamant that Moors respect white-controlled law and order and the American political system. Many respectable blacks, including many of Ali’s followers, might have agreed with his chapter “Masters and Servants,” surmising that a Washingtonian, law-and-order approach to ending racial discrimination was most fitting to their dignity as Moorish Americans.

In short, this portion of the Koran presents Ali’s version of “family values” and respectable behavior, admonishing Moors to stay employed, support their families, live clean lives, stay unified against mutual enemies, and not challenge the basic structure of American society and government. Further, Unto Thee I Grant contains advice that addressed Ali’s concern over the struggle between the carnal and higher selves. For Ali, this internal battle may have mirrored the struggle between white stereotypes of the lazy, immoral Negro and respectable black behavior. Like Dowling’s Aquarian Gospel, Unto Thee I Grant discusses the higher self, or divine essence, within each person and methods for accessing it through mystical and practical self-help. Ali constructed Holy Koran Chapter 36 from a chapter in Unto Thee called “Of the Human Frame and Structure.” He copied this portion into his Koran stating, “Know thyself and the pride of His creation, the line uniting divinity and matter; behold a part of Allah Himself with thee; remember thine own dignity; nor dare descend to evil or to meanness.” The phrase “remember thine own dignity” was the key to Moorish Science and must have reinforced many Moors’ beliefs in their own abilities.

The parts of the Koran we can be relatively sure Noble Drew Ali wrote himself are the book’s one-page introduction and last four chapters, which spell out his political beliefs most plainly. In these pages, Ali presents ideas filtered through generations-old African American interpretations of the Bible to place blacks at the very center of human development and history. The prophet’s retelling of world history stresses the unity of nonwhites, or “Asiatics,” and places all their ancestors in the ancient Holy Land independent of whites centuries ago. In Chapter 45 of his Holy Koran, “The Divine Origin of the Asiatic Nations,” Ali explains:

3. The Egyptians who were the Hamitites, and of a direct descendant of Mizraim, the Arabians, the seed of Hagar, Japanese and Chinese.
4. The Hindoos of India, the descendants of the ancient Canaanites, Hittites and Moabites from the land of Canaan.

5. The Asiatic nations and countries in North, South and Central America; The Moorish Americans and Mexicans in North America, Brazilians, Argentinians and Chilians in South America.

6. Columbians, Nicaraguans and the natives of San Salvador in Central America, etc. All of these are Moslems.53

Sub-Saharan Africans are conspicuously missing from the above roster of the world’s peoples, but Ali accounts for them later by positing migration from Moab in ancient Canaan into all of Africa by “Old man Cush and his family,” who many blacks believed first settled the Upper Egyptian empire known as Kush.54 The specifics of how each particular national group was to have originated within the ancient Holy Land he leaves unclear. Nonetheless, Ali goes on to proclaim his purpose as reuniting all these peoples whose common ancestry proves that divisions between nonwhites based on skin color are meaningless and misleading.55

Within the ranks of Asiatics, Noble Drew Ali defined a unique ethnic identity for African Americans, calling them Moorish Americans, direct descendants of the ancient Moabites. Ruth, the great-grandmother of King David, of whom Jesus was a direct descendant, was herself a “Moabitess,” as both Ali and the Old Testament state.56 Thus, Moors understood Jesus to have been a Moabite also. According to the Old Testament, the kingdom of Moab existed as a feisty independent territory that came into conflict with ancient Israel more than once. An artifact known as the Moabite Stone, discovered in 1868, tells of a Moabite military victory over Israel, knowledge of which may have been absorbed into popular black understandings of biblical history.57 This being the case, Moabite ancestry would have afforded African Americans with an inspiring past; perhaps Ali chose Moab for this reason.

In Ali’s history, the Moabites were an independent nation within a larger group he called Canaanites, a group after which he is reputed to have named his first temple. In the book of Genesis, the father of the Canaanites, Canaan, was the son of Ham and brother of Cush, Egypt, and Put—all men believed to be founders of Bible-age African kingdoms. The idea of the “sons of Ham” has a nefarious history of association with white supremacy and the search for a single genetic source for the black race completely divorced from whites.58 Thus, Peter Wilson has said of Ali’s reference to American blacks as descendants of Canaanites and Moabites, “Biblical tradition accuses the Canaanites and Moabites of every archetypal sin; Drew Ali’s temple-naming was defiant and bold indeed.”59 He may be right, but Ali
was also drawing from old popular interpretations of the Bible, which described the story of Ham as evidence that the ancient inhabitants of the Holy Land had been black. Moreover, Ali’s choice would have had great meaning since, in the African American folklore surrounding the Great Migration, “Canaan” was a popular name for both heaven and the city of Chicago.

Ali further asserts that American blacks are Moorish American, being “descendants of Moroccans and born in America,” and a distinct subgroup of the Asiatic nation. But Morocco had become the home of the Moabites only in recent centuries since Ali posits a migration of the biblical Moabites from Egypt across the African continent. There they founded the “Moroccan Empire,” which spread from Morocco to rule over most of Africa as well as the Americas and the “Atlantis Islands” before the Atlantic Ocean was created by a massive earthquake that cut the Moors off from their distant dominions. Noble Drew Ali’s plan to identify African Americans with Morocco was an astute one. Unlike virtually every other land in Africa, Morocco, along with Ethiopia and Liberia, were the only countries to escape complete colonial domination. Ali may have planned for Moorish Americans to benefit from the type of protection afforded other immigrants by their home countries’ embassies and consulates in the United States. And Ali’s belief that Moroccan subjects could and did enjoy special rights in the United States not allowed African Americans was not farfetched. Black popular culture contained stories of black North Africans escaping racial discrimination in the United States. For example, in his classic and influential work of uplift ideology, Up from Slavery, Booker T. Washington remarked favorably upon an 1879 incident whereby a black man was refused service in a white-owned hotel in a southern town. Because he spoke English, the man in question was assumed to be African American. However, after he managed to prove his Moroccan citizenship, hotel staff apologized and granted him service. Many African Americans recognized that Americans had constructed blackness such that black identity had specifically to do with being American, particularly if one was also from the South. Further, while many Moroccans were ethnically Arab, enough of Moorish or Moroccan citizenry was black that the exact racial characteristics of a Moor were fluid, leaving the door open for black American claims of Moroccan ancestry.

Moorish American identity had still another advantage for African Americans. In black traditions of Ethiopianism, the stories of American blacks’ origins in the ancient Holy Land, Egypt, or Ethiopia were particularly compelling since they provided a noble black heritage divorced from stereotyped images of the African savage.
rocco held the same charm for Moors since Noble Drew Ali's revision of African history saw modern Moroccans as descendants of blacks originally from the Holy Land, tying Moorish Science Temple members to both a respected modern African state and the sacred events of the ancient Middle East. Wisely, Ali threw his own title, Moorish American, into the contemporary debate among blacks over the political implications of terms such as "Negro," "black," "colored," and "Ethiopian" in a clever attempt to find a proud place for blacks in the United States alongside all the Irish, Polish, and Italian Americans by finally defining blacks' home country while affirming their American citizenship.

As Moorish Americans, Ali commanded blacks to know their "ancient and divine creed," Islam.67 First discovered by their ancient Moabite ancestors, this timeless truth had been called by other names until the life of Muhammad of Mecca in the seventh century, when it acquired the name Islam. Ali defined this Islam as "Love, Truth, Peace, Freedom and Justice"—a phrase that was a central part of Moorish American life.68 This phrase summed up all that African Americans felt they were being denied by the whites in the United States, often by those who were self-proclaimed "good" Christians. Thus he writes, "Therefore we are returning the Church and Christianity back to the European nations, as it was prepared by their forefathers for their earthly salvation," to argue Christianity had failed to elevate African Americans politically and socially because God had designed it for the salvation of whites only.69 Like many black Spiritualists and the adherents of mystery religions, the Moors appear to have understood the doctrines of the established Christian churches as a misrepresentation of Jesus' teachings. Ali explained that the true meaning of Jesus had been hidden by Christians until "Mohammed the First," another Canaanite, revived Jesus' ideas under the name of Islam in the old Moabite city of Mecca.70

Why did Noble Drew Ali choose the term "Islam" to describe the essential truth of his religion? This was not an arbitrary choice but rather a very clever one that reveals that Ali was drawing from the mystical philosophies of American fraternal orders.71 Fraternal organizations have always had two dimensions to them. The American orders, while existing publicly as community service organizations, had only become secularized in the 1920s and still espoused Gnostic understandings of God and the world's religions.72 The minority of twentieth-century Freemasons who still perceived fraternal orders as mystery schools also often dabbled in Rosicrucian philosophies, magic, spiritualism, Theosophy, Sufism, and New Thought, while having a working knowledge of a wide variety of the world's religions, including Islam.73 Whether Masons, Shriners, Elks, or Pythians,
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Ali and the initiates of other orders held in common rituals and philosophies, which some members perceived as only colorful remnants from a distant past, while those inclined to mysticism interpreted them as holding the key to spiritual transformation.

Freemasonry’s central ritual symbolizes the spiritual rebirth of the initiate through acquisition of secret truths to be used for personal fulfillment and the service of the community at large. The cycle of death and rebirth is common in the spiritual beliefs of every human culture; Masons reenact it through the “third degree” ritual whereby the initiate undergoes a symbolic death and rebirth into “Masonic light.” By ‘seeing the light,’ so to speak, the initiate discovers within himself the spiritual power to learn the further lessons of Freemasonry’s other thirty degrees. As W. Kirk MacNulty has described the process, for those searching for mystical personal transformation, Masonic rebirth represents “a primordial disaster, a catastrophic event which results in profound means by which the loss can be made good and the original, blissful, human state restored.” The “primordial disaster” of African Americans’ enslavement and postemancipation suffering in urban America must have been interpreted by some black Masons as a reflection of the symbolic catastrophe preceding Masonic rebirth. Again, many blacks open to black Spiritualism or other types of alternative spirituality would have recognized here, as with Ali’s Holy Koran, the idea that the power for divine transformation from a fallen state is derived, not from God or Jesus, but from within each person.

The Masonic tradition would have further appealed to Ali because of its specific interest in the Middle East and the ancient Holy Land and Egypt as the sources of transforming wisdom he called Islam. Indeed, white and black Masonic lore and ritual are permeated with references to the East. For example, initiates to the first degree of Freemasonry, Entered Apprentice, walk from the western towards the eastern wall of the lodge during ritual because, as one Mason explained, “Each of us, . . . has come from the mystical ‘East,’ the eternal source of all light and life, and our life here is described as being spent in the ‘West’ (that is, in a world which is the antipodes of our original home, and under conditions of existence as far removed from those we came from . . . as is West from East).” Many interwar Freemasons also still saw the nonwhite peoples of the Middle East and Africa as endowed with knowledge of the wisdom Masonic lessons and rituals are designed to impart: “It is, of course, common knowledge that great secret systems of the Mysteries . . . existed in the East, in Chaldea, Assyria, Egypt, Greece, Italy, amongst the Hebrews, amongst Mahommedans and amongst Christians; even among uncivilized
African races they are to be found," wrote the white Mason W. L. Wilmshurst in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{78} Contributing to a sense that Masonic lessons are universal truths, Masonic literature is sprinkled with ample references to and information about the world's religions, past and present, including much about Muslim beliefs, in a tone that assumes the reader's expertise regarding them and the one esoteric mystical truth that exists in all belief systems.\textsuperscript{79} Noble Drew Ali also argued that nonwhites had special access to this one message, his \textit{Holy Koran} revealing, "That the world may hear and know the truth, that among the descendants of Africa there is still much wisdom to be learned in these days for the redemption of the sons of men."\textsuperscript{80} For African American fraternalists with mystical leanings, such ideas took flight when combined with the popular black traditions of historical revision that held that the originators of this timeless Masonic wisdom were American blacks' ancestors in the Ancient East.\textsuperscript{81}

From this Freemasonic mysticism emerged a popular reli-
igious Arabiana that Peter Lamborn Wilson has termed "the 'hid­
dden' Islamic tradition in western culture." This aspect of American religious thought developed over two centuries as Americans appropriated and reinterpreted what they knew of the world's religions to communicate Masonic philosophies of transformation. The rituals and regalia of the Ancient Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, or Shriners, are particularly rich in popular expressions of this hidden Islamic tradition. The Shrine is a higher order formed, in 1871, by 32nd- and 33rd-degree Masons, both York and Scottish rite, in an attempt to separate the elite and powerful from the Masonic mainstream. The founders of this order were quite well versed in the scholarly literature on Muslims and the Middle East, as far as it existed in the 1870s, a number of them having traveled to the Middle East seeking information on fraternal orders there. Using their own understanding of Middle Eastern history, early Shriners designed a branch of Masonry decorated specifically in American interpretations of Islam and Arabia. In a tale reminiscent of the mystical travel stories of Levi Dowling, Nicholas Notovitch, H. Spencer Lewis, and others, the founder of the Shrine, Billy Florence, claimed to have traveled to Mecca. There he received "the secret work," brought it back to America, and established the Ancient Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine. (Recall that Noble Drew Ali prefaced his *Holy Koran* with the same explanation.) Florence held that his teachings were linked to key founders of the Muslim religious and political tradition since they were reputedly written by Ali, the fourth caliph and cousin of the prophet Muhammad, in 644 C.E. in Mecca. The Ancient Egyptian Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, the black Shriners, employed a similar story, claiming the order had been established in 1893 by a group of black Masons under the tutelage of a Syrian, a Palestinian, and a North African who were sent by the "Shrine in Arabia" to spread the order among African Americans.

The Shriners' representations of Islam were simultaneously a mockery and a celebration. The order's members presented themselves as authentic carriers of Eastern culture received from Muslims themselves, no doubt irritating the Ahmadiyya missionary, Muhammad Sadiq, and the few other immigrant Muslims living in Chicago. Certainly, many Masons believed audiences read the extravagant, unruly Shriner parades as a mockery of the Craft. However, being highly experienced Masons who had invested substantial energy and money in obtaining a place in the Shrine order, Shriners were by and large serious about the Masonic wisdom they nonetheless seemed to make light of in their flamboyant parades and fantastic foundational history. In fact, many Shriners understood their order's parades, rega-
lia, and rituals to communicate in a light-hearted, accessible way, as
one white Shriner put it, "non-sectarian moral teachings." Shriner
parades also often employed comic entertainment by men dressed,
not simply in a fez, but as mock Arabs or Persians. In the 1920s, the
country's most prominent black weekly, the Chicago Defender, printed
large items on fraternal gatherings and parades, including one typical
Shriner parade about which they reported, "The gaiety of 10,000
Desert Sons in 'whoopie' colors and a bedlam of noise will give the
annual session of their order a real Oriental aspect. . . . The Shrine
Jesters . . . will sing and rejoice and give praise to 'Allah.'" Shriners,
black and white, routinely held large parades in every American city
in which they publicly presented themselves as Arabs who worshiped
"Allah" and espoused a mystical philosophy called "Islam." If Afri-
can Americans involved with the black Shriners, or other black fra-
ternal orders, understood Egypt, the Holy Land, or Arabia to have
been home to their ancestors, they might well have also understood
their public appearances as opportunities to communicate black
ownership of the mystical East and its secrets, in spite of the campy
presentation.

There is compelling evidence Ali's religion and his use of the
word Islam were filtered through this Freemasonic mysticism. Ac-
cording to the popular tradition surrounding the prophet, Ali was a
Pythian, Mason, and a member of the Ancient Egyptian Arabic Order
of Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, or black Shriners. Regardless of
whether Ali actually ever joined one of these orders, it is clear he was
well versed in black fraternal subculture. Publicly, the Moors used the
popular representations of Islam and the Middle East found in Ma-
sonic and Shriner regalia, lingo, and ritual to communicate the an-
cient Eastern origins of Moorish Science. The prophet called himself “Noble” Drew Ali, using a title Shriners also put before their names while in the temple or parades but which he claimed to have received in England.91 Other Moors similarly attached the perceived Moorish suffix “El” or “Bey” to their names to mark their nationality. Ali expected male Moors to wear a red fez at all times, the fez being a symbol of mystical knowledge to Freemasons.92 Resembling Shriners as they appeared at balls and in parades, male and female Moors regularly dressed in pseudo-Arab garb to communicate their Moorish American identities, mystical religious beliefs, and fraternal respectability.93 That this fraternal connection was clear to locals is evident, for instance, from the fact that E. Franklin Frazier, in his 1932 The Negro Family in Chicago, discussed the Moors alongside the Elks, Odd Fellows, and Masons in a section on social and civic organizations.94 In fact, the prophet admitted as much when he explained that his purpose was “to Americanize the Oriental idea of Islam [which] involves many changes that are more or less negative to the main purpose of the Islamic religion.”

Public understandings of Islam and the Middle East undergirded average blacks’ readings of the Shriners’ and Moors’ representations of their ideals. In an age before color television, most Americans drew their perceptions of how a Muslim, Indian, or Arab looked or sounded from the few black and white images found on the movie screen or in the local newspaper. The Chicago Defender, the most prominent African American-owned newspaper in the country, for instance, was a key molder of black readers’ perceptions of the world’s inhabitants through its foreign news coverage and, in particular, through the paper’s back page, entitled “The Week in Pictures.” Taking advantage of whatever racial diversity existed in African, North African, and Middle Eastern countries, the Defender printed photos that presented the reader with black people from Arab and Muslim African countries. A large photo of the turbaned Sultan of Zanzibar, for instance, reinforced the popular perception that much of black Africa was Muslim and had been for centuries.95 Naturally, the Defender and other black publications were unable to tutor readers on all the intricacies of the Qur’an, scriptural Islam, or the countless variations of Islamic belief and practice around the world. These periodicals often simply described Islam as a monotheistic religion which “knows no colorline.”96 Most blacks probably knew no more about the religion than this, simply associating the word Islam with ancient African wisdom.97 Moreover, things “Oriental” had for at least a century represented a sense of magical potential to Americans, black and white. Thus, the Moors’ exotic dress and symbolic repre-
sentations of their ideas drew on generations-old associations formed in the days of itinerant antebellum peddlers’ use of the trope of the “mysterious East” as a site of luxury and ancient secrets in order to make exotic patent medicines dressed as Oriental healing agents.99

Consequently, Ali was drawing from both general African American popular culture as well as fraternal subculture when he adopted the crescent and star to represent his faith. This symbol appeared on Moors’ fezzes and on the front page of the Moors’ newspaper, the Moorish Guide, above the word “Salvation.”100 It adorned
the packaging and advertisement for the Moors’ patent medicines, such as “Moorish Mineral and Healing Oil” and “Moorish Body Builder and Blood Purifier.” In the 1920s, the crescent and star also appeared on the flags of a number of Muslim countries, such as Turkey, among the black Spiritualist advertisements that permeated African American newspapers and street life, and throughout the American Arabiana of patent medicine labels, magicians’ props, and fortune tellers’ costumes. Moreover, the crescent and star were, and still are, the official logo of both black and white Mystic Shrine orders, used on fezzes, publications, parade costumes, and banners. This logo was an obvious symbol for communicating the multifaceted character of the Moorish Science Temple, simultaneously embodying Moorish nationality, Ali’s ancient Eastern mystical secrets, and fraternal respectability.

Was it possible that black parade audiences or newspaper readers would perceive a Shriner parade or the costumes of Noble
Drew Ali and his followers as having mystical or religious meaning? As a rule, perhaps not. However, both Freemasons and many black Spiritualists understood that the deep wisdom they sought to communicate both transcended verbal expression and one's native language, therefore necessitating communication by way of symbols.\textsuperscript{103} That these symbols might be misinterpreted by the uninitiated was an added bonus, ensuring sacred information would not be misused by outsiders. Clearly, many interwar blacks did read the Moors' use of the word Islam and their representations of the East in precisely this way, since the prophet won thousands of converts, including a few who joined after a well-publicized parade the Moors held in full costume.\textsuperscript{104} Many interwar African Americans knew that within this people's Arabiana resided all sorts of alternative understandings of human history and spirituality shared by blacks and some whites.

Since Noble Drew Ali's death in 1929, Moorish Americans have retained the eclectic Western esoteric spirit of his religious ideas in the stories surrounding the prophet's mysterious early life. Popular tradition regarding Ali has grown over the years and, like the mystical travel stories of Notovitch, Lewis, and the Shriner Billy Florence, tells of Ali's mystical travels in the East before his arrival in Chicago in 1925. Peter Wilson summarizes the most colorful version of these stories, some part of which was perhaps initiated by Ali himself:

Drew's father was said to have been of Moorish extraction, his mother of Cherokee ancestry. By the early 1880's, ... the Drew family had settled in Newark, New Jersey, where they are said to have met and studied with "Master Adept" Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, who visited the U.S. in the winter of 1882–83. ... According to most authors, Drew knew nothing of any deeper mysteries until his visit to the Orient, sometime before 1912. Aged sixteen he shipped out as a merchant seaman—some say he took a job as a magician in a traveling circus (he is also said to have worked as a railway expressman)—and somehow ended up in Egypt. There he met the last priest of an ancient cult of High Magic who took him to the Pyramid of Cheops, led him in blindfolded, and abandoned him. When Drew found his way out unaided the magus recognized him as a potential adept and offered him initiation. ... In Egypt his prophecy manifested as a book, the "Circle Seven Koran," or it might have been in Mecca, where he was somehow empowered by Sultan Abdul Aziz al-Sa'ud, ruler of the city and later of the whole country.\textsuperscript{105}

This story communicated the basic essence of Ali's teachings, the desire for self-transformation from within facilitated by the ancient tools of Eastern wisdom. Ali arrived in Chicago armed with this
story, or a similar one, knowing it would draw on popular forms of American spirituality that many of Chicago's blacks held dear.\textsuperscript{106}

In retrospect, the identity of Noble Drew Ali's religion has been quite obvious for seventy-five years. For to have named his movement the Moorish Science Temple of America clearly linked it to all the students of New Thought and Christian Science, the Gnostic Freemasons and African American Spiritualists, who likewise favored the term "science" for their wisdom as a sign that the truth behind the workings of the universe could be rationally observed and documented by drawing on the divine essence within.\textsuperscript{107} The prophet could have called his movement by another name, say, "Moorish American Islamic Mosque," for example. But he did not. Instead he strove to create a new religion clearly connected to the female-led Spiritualist churches with whom he actually shared much philosophically. Yet, male-led and fraternal in appearance, Moorish Science was still divorced from black spiritualism's association with hoodoo, gambling, and the informal economy.\textsuperscript{108}

Noble Drew Ali's genius was to connect publicly Western esoteric religion with African American political culture, in the process adding a distinctly southern African American chapter to the multiracial world of American gnosticism. That his use of such a diverse collection of sources was sensible in 1920s Chicago is clear from the fact that three thousand people joined and ran his movement. In fact, Noble Drew Ali was in large part simply preaching to the converted.\textsuperscript{109} Operating within a context where many people were familiar with black Spiritualism or mystical Freemasonry, Moorish Science's use of the trope of Morocco, a mystical Jesus, a belief in the divine essence within each person, and a prophet who claimed authority from Africans and Arabs, whom he mimicked in dress and name, all made the religion recognizably "Islamic" in interwar black Chicago. We must take Ali's use of the word "Islam" and other things "Islamic" as symbols which he used not to direct his believers to scriptural Islam, or to the beliefs and practices of Muslims in the United States or elsewhere, but rather as a sign of authenticity and secret wisdom African Americans had come to recognize in other contexts already. That this understanding remained unknown to journalists and academics for so many years should not be entirely surprising. American mystics like Ali were jealous of their knowledge, wishing to obscure it from outsiders. But the work of investigating the Moors on their own terms, in the context of their own religious economy, pays off in providing a glimpse into the incredibly sophisticated world of black alternative spirituality. The decade following the rush of the Great Migration was one of the most innovative and im-
Important in American religious history as thousands of African Americans from the South began experimenting with new beliefs, and reformulations of old beliefs, in the diverse intellectual environment of the urban North. Today, the secrets of Noble Drew Ali’s mystical religion reveal the dangers of underestimating the cultural autonomy of that era’s new religious movements and the men and women who created them.

Notes

1. Ira De Augustine Reid, “Let Us Prey,” Opportunity 4 (1926): 274–78. As late as 1964—in the midst of the civil rights movement—some black leaders still held deep contempt for working-class southern blacks who dared to worship outside the established black church. Scholar Joseph R. Washington thus wrote of urban black new religious movements, “They are at the whim and mercy of religious pimps whose prostitution of a simple people is possible by reason of their socio-economic pain. . . . Those separated cults which are the extension of plundering sharks and unconscionable greed quickly pass out of existence as the Negro peasant gains a foothold in the ghetto.” Joseph R. Washington, Jr., Black Religion: The Negro and Christianity in the United States (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 120–21; see also, 114–15.


7. A particularly bad habit of this practice includes the use of sentences that begin, "Islam teaches . . . " or "Islam requires the believer to . . . " However, "Islam" does not teach or require, it is Muslims who do—and sometimes they do not. Further, these authors use unidirectional, teacher-to-convert models of religious transmission that assume new believers will necessarily seek out information from Muslims themselves, rejecting sources deemed unconventional or inappropriate by Muslims or academics, a situation that does not accurately portray how the Moors created their religion. See McCloud, *African American Islam*, 2–5, 15; Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience*, 72. Similarly, Kathleen O’Connor, rather than engaging with the American context of black alternative spirituality, looks for similarities between medieval Islam and twentieth-century African American ideas about human divinity in a way that denies change over time to Muslims and their religious philosophies. She gives no credit to the several centuries of Western esoteric thought from which these ideas also emanate, assuming that certain seemingly Muslim religious ideas could not have occurred simultaneously among a broad spectrum of religious thinkers. Kathleen Malone O’Connor, “The Islamic Jesus: Messiahhood and Human Divinity in African American Muslim Exegesis,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 66, no. 3 (1998): 493–532. Another common theory is typified by the attitude of Samory Rashid. Regarding the Moorish Science Temple, he states, “despite its weak authenticity resulting from its failure to maintain strict adherence to Islamic beliefs and practices, scholars are unable to explain how illiterate exslaves who were essentially cut off from their religious roots in Africa were able to resurrect even the faintest forms of Islam during the early twentieth century.” Here he seems to be arguing for some kind of African-Muslim survival in black culture, an approach that does not give African Americans
credit for having been willing and able to draw from the abundant sources of religious information available to them in interwar America. Samory Rashid, “Islamic Influence in America: Struggle, Flight, Community,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 19, no. 1 (1999): 23.

8. In the secondary literature, it is easy to find claims that the Moors did practice certain presumably Muslim habits in the 1920s, for example, abstaining from alcohol. Yet, so did the thousands of Americans who obeyed the prohibition amendment in those years. Similarly, we should view carefully any seemingly Muslim practices Arthur Huff Fauset observed among the Moors in the 1940s, since there seems to have been an obvious movement afoot among Moors to emulate Muslims after the prophet’s death. See, for example, the appearance in 1935 of the phrase “Salam Alaykum” in the *Moorish Guide*, as well as plans for an Arabic school. “To the Moors throughout the Nation” and “Weekly Bulletin,” *Moorish Guide*, April 19, 1935. No Arabic appeared in pre-1929 issues of the *Moorish Guide*. Fauset, *Black Gods of the Metropolis*, 51; McCloud, *African American Islam*, 13–16, 201 n. 14; Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience*, 97–98.


10. There is ample record of the Moors’ public career during the prophet’s last days in Chicago, and these events provide an interesting view of how the Moors put their religion to use in building a powerful position for themselves in the city’s Second Ward Republican political machine. See, for example, “Moors to Hold National Conclave October 14,” *Chicago Defender*, October 13, 1928; “Mrs. Drew Ali Organizes Young Moorish People,” *Chicago Defender*, December 1, 1928; and “Moorish Leader Attends Inauguration of Governor,” *Chicago Defender*, January 19, 1929. Old copies of the Moors’ newspaper, the *Moorish Guide*, are also loaded with further intriguing evidence and can be found in the Moorish Science Temple collection at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library.

11. Noble Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple*, also known as the *Circle Seven Koran*, functioned as the primary religious scripture of the movement and was read at the Moors’ subdued Friday and Sunday services. Noble Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple* (Chicago: n.p., 1927); Fauset, *Black Gods of the Metropolis*, 48–51. Fauset’s description of a Moorish Science service results from his participant-observation research of the movement in the early 1940s and is the only study of its kind. Though he described the Moorish Science Temple of ten years after the prophet’s death, it is likely the Moors did read the *Koran* at services before 1930 also.

13. Unfortunately, Noble Drew Ali left no personal papers or autobiography that we could use to reconstruct how his religious ideas were formed or which movements or thinkers inspired him. I have excluded works written by followers published after the prophet’s death. After Ali’s death, the splintering of the Moorish Science Temple into competing factions, each led by a man claiming to be a reincarnation of the prophet Ali, resulted in some dramatic changes. The internecine violence that resulted in Ali’s death, and later the deaths of two white police officers, brought the movement under intense FBI surveillance as a suspected subversive organization. The unwanted attention of the FBI and the Chicago Police Department, and a falling out with the editorial staff of the *Chicago Defender*, caused the Moors to become increasingly secretive. Further, without the prophet present to enforce his interpretation of Moorish Science, reinterpretation by the movement’s leaders became pervasive, though rank-and-file Moors had been reinterpreting Moorish ideas to some degree all along. See "Moorish Cult Follows Chicago Convention with Murder of Two Policemen" and "To Disband Moorish Cult; Two Policemen Dead," *Chicago Defender*, September 28, 1929; Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience*, 101–5.


15. For students of mystery religions, there is a distinction between the Christ and Jesus, who became a Christ through his spiritual transformation. Christs of other ages include the Buddha, Melchizedek, Zoroaster, and sometimes Muhammad, among others.

tery schools, Christian Science, and New Thought, and often black nationalism. Based on their understandings of the transcendent truth of God's spirit in each person, many black Spiritualists believe in humankind's ability to understand the "science" of the spiritual workings of the universe and to undergo mental transformation, for a chosen few, into a divine form. Baer, Black Spiritual Movement, 10, 26, 40, 92, 110–39.

17. The Akashic records could only be accessed by sufficiently spiritually adept persons able to write "automatically" while in a trance-like state. The most famous interpreter of the Akashic records was Edgar Cayce, the noted clairvoyant and healer, who produced readings from the records similar to that found in the Aquarian Gospel. It is not surprising that widespread belief in the Akashic records, Spiritualism, séances, and channeling coincided with the development of the telegraph, telephone, and radio broadcasting, all of which involve invisible means of information transmission. Eva S. Dowling, "Introduction," in Dowling, Aquarian Gospel, 16–17; J. Furst, Edgar Cayce's Story of Jesus (New York: Berkley Books, 1968); Kevin J. Todeschi, Edgar Cayce on the Akashic Records (Virginia Beach, Va.: A.R.E. Press, 1998), 1–4, 67–69; and Trimble, "Spiritualism and Channeling," 334–35.

18. It is popularly believed this portion of the New Testament was edited out of the final text by leaders of the early Christian church struggling to gain authority over an expanding membership. Janet Bock, The Jesus Mystery: Of Last Years and Unknown Travels (Los Angeles: Aura Books, 1980), 4–5.

19. There were other changes here or there, the meaning of which are hard to discern. For example, a passage in the introduction to the Aquarian Gospel called "Man" became Chapter One in Ali's Koran, "The Creation and Fall of Man." Within this chapter, Ali changed Dowling's line "Creative Fiat gave to man, to spirit man, a soul that he might function on the plane of soul" to "Creative Fate gave to man ... " in his Koran. We can only speculate on the meaning of such changes, considering Ali never made them or his use of Dowling's work public. Levi Dowling, "Man," quoted in E. Dowling, "Introduction," 17; Ali, Koran, 4.


29. The Ahmadiyya are a heretical Muslim sect whose own leader, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, proclaimed himself prophet in 1880. Persecution from other Muslims, plus the group's experiences as subjects of Christian missionary work in northern India, encouraged a number of them to leave Asia in the early twentieth century and proselytize in Europe, West Africa, Australia, and the United States. Yohanan Friedmann, Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and Its Medieval Background (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 30–31, 117, 132–35. By 1926, Sadiq's successor, Mohammed Yusuf Khan, and his converts were taking out ads on the Defender's religion and spirituality page which encouraged blacks to come to their Sunday services and learn about the religion "of your forefathers." The Islam they presented to the South Side in their tracts and newspaper was similarly crafted to appeal to black interests. In articles such as "Crescent or Cross? A Negro May Aspire to Any Position under Islam without Discrimination," the Ahmadiyya advertised an Islam that ignored the slaveholding and racial conflict that is to be found in Muslim history, or in any thirteen-hundred-year stretch of the human past. Further, Sadiq and his converts walked the streets dressed in robes and turbans, reinforcing the cliché images of Muslims that could be found on the back page of the Defender and in Shriner parades. These missionaries were only very modestly successful. One complained, in the 1950s, that he felt his movement had not been able to provide for black converts' social and political needs or accommodate their militance. "Islam or Mohammedism Means the Religion of Peace," Chicago Defender, October 23, 1926; "From a Moslem," Chicago Defender, June 4, 1927; "East Indian Tells of Native Religion," Chicago Defender, August 31, 1929; Haddad and Smith, Mission to America, 197 n. 66; Charles S. Braden, "Moslem Missionaries in America," Religion in Life 28, no. 3 (Summer 1959): 338–39; Turner, Islam in the African-American Experience, 126–30; and Richard Brent Turner, "The Ahmadiyya Mission to Blacks in the
United States in the 1920s," *Journal of Religious Thought* 44, no. 2 (Winter/Spring 1988): 61. So far, there is no direct evidence of contact between Ali and Sadiq. Ali presented himself as a prophet himself, a claim the Ahmadiyya would never have accepted considering how hard they had been struggling to improve the precarious position of their own prophet, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, in the eyes of the vast majority of Muslims worldwide who understood Muhammad ibn Abdullah of Mecca to have been God's final prophet.

30. Charles Braden has speculated that the Ahmadiyya may have gotten their belief in Jesus' life in India from the Notovitch book, but I would argue it comes from their own interpretation of the Qur'an and northern Indian popular religious tradition. Braden, "Moslem Missionaries in America," 337–38. In fact, the Ahmadi Jesus was, in part, a product of the Ahmadiyya's experience with aggressive Christian missionaries in British India. These missionaries had attempted to play on local Muslim belief, which held that Jesus survived crucifixion and ascended to heaven in human form, in order to win them over to the Christian idea of the resurrection. As religious reformers, Ahmad and his followers attempted to reinterpret scriptural Islam in such a way as to eliminate interpretations that opportunistic Christian missionaries might liken to Christian doctrine. Indeed, the Ahmadi missionaries in Chicago had certainly turned the tables, appealing to the people of a Christian country on their own terms, just as Christian missionaries in India had done by appealing to Muslim beliefs about Jesus. Compare Qur'an 4:157 and N. A. Faruqui, *Ahmadiyyat in the Service of Islam* (Newark, Calif.: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore, 1983), 89–99; Maulana Muhammad Ali, *Muhammad and Christ* (Columbus, Ohio: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore, 1993), 82–89. To be clear, the Faruqui and Ali works are both published by the Lahori branch of Ahmadiyya Muslims and not the Qadiani branch to which the 1920s Chicago missionary Muhammad Sadiq was affiliated. While the two wings of the movement are hostile to one another, they do seem to agree about their interpretations of Jesus. *Muslim Sunrise* 3, no. 3 (July 1930).

31. The Ahmadi attention to Notovitch's book is hard to understand since his version of the events, which upholds the divinity of Jesus and places Jesus in India before his thirties, contradicts theirs. Ahmadi doctrine agrees more fully with prominent Rosicrucian H. Spencer Lewis's *Mystical Life of Jesus*, which argues that Jesus' transformation on the cross was only mystical in nature, such that he was able to live out his life afterward secretly with his disciples in Galilee, though never visiting India or Tibet. H. Spencer Lewis, *Mystical Life of Jesus* (San José, Calif.: AMORC, 1929). See also Beskow, *Strange Tales about Jesus*, 63-64; and Braden, "Moslem Missionaries in America," 337–38.

33. Bock, The Jesus Mystery, 2–5, 20–21, 23. Janet Bock’s volume, The Jesus Mystery, is in fact a prominent example of a modern retelling of the story of the mystical Jesus. Desiring to investigate the Aquarian Gospel and the earlier Notovitch text, Bock and her husband trekked through India and Tibet speaking with a number of Swamis and religious leaders regarding the tradition of Jesus there. She also lists two further books published by men who traveled to Tibet in search of the same manuscripts which she says may now be lost. Indeed, the Aquarian Gospel is unusual in that its source was automatic writing, rather than travel experiences. See also Baird T. Spaulding, Life and Teachings of the Masters of the Far East, vol. 1 (Marina Del Rey, Calif.: DeVorss & Co., 1924); and Elizabeth Claire Prophet, The Lost Years of Jesus (Livingston, Mont.: Summit University Press, 1984). I must give credit here to Wilson’s excellent discussion of the Aquarian Gospel and the larger tradition of the mystical Jesus for pointing in this direction for the analysis of Moorish Science. Wilson, Sacred Drift, 19.


35. Apparently, Bengalee gave lectures at Mizpah Spiritual Church and Fraternal Spiritualist Church, as well as the University of Chicago, lectures which were advertised, among other places, in the Chicago Herald Examiner and a magazine called Progressive Thinker. The titles of Bengalee’s speeches were seemingly crafted to cater to the 1920s audience’s interests in alternative spirituality and self-improvement, some sounding more like lectures on New Thought than Islam, for instance, “The Object of Life: Spiritual Progress and the Means of Accomplishing It.” Moslem Sunrise described another speech as, “‘The Supreme Success in Life.’ This spiritually informative lecture is an outline which the speaker is prepared to elaborate into a study course.” Is it possible the Ahmadiyya converts came to experience Islam, not through a conversion experience, but as a “course” in “Success”? “Activities of the American Ahmadiyya Moslem Mission,” Moslem Sunrise 3, no. 3 (July 1930), 12.

36. In Marcus Garvey’s UNIA, the Ahmadiyya found sympathetic pan-Africanists who also saw potential in Islam for unity among all non-whites around the world. Tony Martin has shown that UNIA leadership flirted with the idea of endorsing Islam as the official faith of the movement; Garvey never settled on one religion, however, believing he might alienate potential supporters by choosing either Christianity or Islam. Tony Martin, Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976), 74–76.


38. Ibid., vii.

40. Ibid., 135–41.


52. In 1920s America, the term Asiatic was commonly used in the press to describe nonwhite peoples from the Middle East, East Asia, or the Indian subcontinent, regardless of nationality or religious persuasion. Ali's ideas about the unity of nonwhites around the world appear to have been part of a trend among African American thinkers impressed with perceived political and military victories at the expense of Europe by countries like Japan. Allen, "Identity and Destiny," 187–88.


54. Ali, _Koran_, 58. Bay, _White Image in the Black Mind_, 27–30. The ancient Israelites are also mysteriously absent from Ali's list. Yet, considering the several centuries of popular African American biblical interpretation that sees black history reflected in the story of the ancient Israelites' bondage and eventual escape from slavery in Egypt, and Ali's revisionist history that argues the ancient Egyptians, "Old man Cush and his family," were only distant kin of modern African Americans, this may have been a necessary omission on Ali's part.


59. Wilson, _Sacred Drift_, 17. Regarding these "archetypal sins" and evil deeds, see, for example, 2 Kings 13:20, Amos 2:2.

60. Bay, _White Image in the Black Mind_, 120–21; Joscelyn Godwin, _Theosophical Enlightenment_ (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 82; Moses, _Afrotopia_, 55–56. The first literate slave to be handed a copy of the Bible no doubt eventually came across Psalms 68:31, "Princes shall come forth from Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands to God." African Americans have interpreted this passage as predicting the rebirth of Africa and as a reminder of their perceived glorious past, sparking a long tradition of revisionist black history. Many American blacks believed Jesus and the Israelites to have been black, in rejection of the blond, blue-eyed Christ of
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white Christianity. For instance, in Chicago, the well-known Reverend James Webb advertised his sermons in the Defender weekly. His notices announced “JESUS WAS A NEGRO BY BLOOD—King Tut was a Negro by Blood” and “Negro universal king with woolly hair is coming to rule the world. Proven by biblical history. . . . The race problem will be settled by him.” “JESUS WAS A NEGRO BY BLOOD,” Chicago Defender, February 2, 1929; “Negro Universal King,” Chicago Defender, March 17, 1928. Even Robert Abbott, editor of the Defender, placed a Sphinx on his paper’s masthead, since it was “a convenient popular symbol.” Roi Ottley, Lonely Warrior: The Life and Times of Robert S. Abbott (Chicago: H. Regnery Co., 1955), 141. Other blacks, like Ali, had a more multiracial vision of the character of Bible-age inhabitants of the Holy Land. Randall Burkett has noted that Marcus Garvey argued that Jesus had had “the blood of all races in him” in an attempt to avoid the wrath of some of his detractors who accused him of advocating racial separatism. Considering Ali names Garvey as a harbinger of his own prophethood in his Koran, it is certainly possible that Ali got this idea from Garvey or knew many of his followers were familiar with it also. Ali, Koran, 59; Baer, Black Spiritual Movement, 94; Randall K. Burkett, Garveyism as a Religious Movement: The Institutionalization of a Black Civil Religion (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1978), 53–54; Marcus Garvey, “Lesson 1: Intelligence, Education, Universal Knowledge and How to Get It,” in Marcus Garvey: Life and Lessons, ed. Robert S. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 196; Moses, Afrotopia, 24, 51.


63. Ali, Koran, 58. Ernest Allen has rightly pointed out that the legend of Atlantis Island has a long history in the West among all sorts of Americans interested in mysticism and alternative spirituality, most famously in the nineteenth century among members of the Theosophical Society. More recently, Shirley MacLaine has popularized the idea of a lost chosen people of Atlantis. Allen, “Identity and Destiny,” 186–87.

65. Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (1901; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 60. Later, Malcolm X recognized the irony of black Moroccan privilege in the United States. “A friend of mine who’s very dark put a turban on his head and went into a restaurant in Atlanta before they called themselves desegregated. He went into a white restaurant, he sat down, they served him, and he said, ‘What would happen if a Negro came in here?’ And there he’s sitting, black as night, but because he had his head wrapped up the waitress looked back at him and says, ‘Why, there wouldn’t no nigger dare come in here.’ Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet,” in *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements*, ed. George Breitman (New York: Pathfinder, 1989), 36. See also Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1947; repr., New York: Vintage, 1980), 499. Thanks go to Karen Ferguson for this citation.


68. Ibid., 59.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid., 3, 57. Ali puts fellow Asians at the center of this ancient philosophy, calling the modern Arabs of the Saudi Peninsula “olive”-skinned “Angels” sent by God to guard Mecca and “keep the unbelievers away.” Ali, “Koran Questions,” 58.


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77. Wilmshurst, Meaning of Masonry, 29.

78. Ibid., 23–24, 203–4; Pike, Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, 38.

79. See, for example, “Kaaba,” “Order of Kadiri,” “Koran,” in Mackey, Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry, 375, 378, 417; Albert Mackey, The History of Freemasonry: Its Legendary Origins (1881; repr., New York: Gramercy Books, 1996), 233–43; Harris, Harris’ Masonic Text-Book, 10–11; Pike, Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, 29, 35, 38, 53, 78–82; Wilmshurst, Meaning of Masonry, 40, 64, 178–82. These references are usually positive with respect to Muslims, though on occasion Masons desiring to Christianize Masonry made more critical statements, such as J. S. M. Ward: “[Freemasonry] is by no means so exalted as that of the Christian faith, to which most of its members subscribe. Indeed if we accepted it as the best code, we should be going backward, not forward, in spiritual evolution, quite as effectively as if we became Mohammedans and gave up Christianity.” J. S. M. Ward, An Interpretation of Our Masonic Symbols (n.d.; repr., Kila, Mont.: Kessinger Publishing, n.d.), 10–11.


81. Compare Ali’s revisions of world history with this history from Harris’s Masonic Text-Book, written by an African American Grand Master Mason around the turn of the century:

Nimrod or Belus, the son of Cush, the eldest son of Ham, and founder of the Babylonian monarchy, kept possession of the plain [Craft], and founded the first great empire at Babylon. From Shinar the science and the art were carried to distant parts of the world, notwithstanding the confusion of the dialects and which is presumed to have
given rise to the universal practice of conversing without speaking, and communications between Masons by tokens and signs.

Mizraim, the second son of Ham, carried to, and preserved in Egypt, the original skill, and cultivated the arts—monuments of which are still extant in that country under the name of Pyramids. . . . It is presumed that the offspring of Shem propagated the science as far as China and Japan. Abraham, born two years after the death of Noah, had learned the science, before the Grand Architect of the Universe called him to travel from Ur of the Chaldees. He communicated it to the Canaanites, for which they honored him as a prince.

Harris, *Harris’ Masonic Text-Book*, 10–11. Around 1920, black scholarship on African history began to be overshadowed by a popular counterpart that exaggerated ancient African achievement in order to promote racial pride. Marcus Garvey and many other more obscure African Americans self-published books and pamphlets containing revisionist histories of the continent which described the ancient Holy Land, Ethiopia, or Egypt as sources of ancient knowledge that would set blacks free were they to rediscover it. Often these works were, like Ali’s *Koran*, millennial in tone and written by men presenting themselves as renewers of black culture. These books go on to argue that ancient African wisdom proved whites had been lying to blacks about black history for centuries in order to keep them powerless. Hickey and Wylie, *An Enchanting Darkness*, 270–72. For more on popular African American revisionist history, see Stephen Howe, *Afrocentrism: Mythical Pasts and Imagined Homes* (London: Verso, 1998), 42–50, 66–76.

82. Wilson explains, “If [the] Masonic reading of Islam can be called a misreading, nevertheless it contains a fortuitous element—an example of heresy acting as a means of cultural transfer. That is: an image of Islam (however distorted) had in fact moved from East to West and brought about cultural ferment.” Wilson, *Sacred Drift*, 26.


88; George L. Root, *The Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine* (Peoria, Ill.: Mohammad Temple, 1903). While these books may not be the most historically accurate portrayal of the early Muslim communities, the main author behind this information, the well-known Arabist and illustrator A. L. Rawson, put extensive effort into his research, giving thousands of average Americans access to information usually restricted to academic circles. Regarding Rawson, see Melish, cited above, and Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, 278–81, 284–87; and Paul Johnson, “Albert Leighton Rawson,” *Theosophical History* 2, no. 7 (July 1988): 229–51.


87. Regarding white Shriners’ explanation of the meaning of their costumes and their intention to communicate mystical messages through their pseudo-Muslim identities in parades, in spite of their comical behavior, see Shriner publications such as *100 Years of Love, 1883–1983: A Centennial Commemorative* (Chicago: Medinah Temple, 1984), 1, 2, 6. Beginning in the 1920s, there was a debate among some Shriners about the meaning of their parades and regalia, some arguing for “histrionic rather than for esoteric or historical purposes” in the use of presumed-Muslim symbols and words by the order’s founders. See, for instance, Melish, *History of the Imperial Council*, 10. Each Shriner probably had his own understanding of the Shrine, some more secular, some more religious.

88. “Shriners to Get Welcome in Big Style,” *Chicago Defender*, June 29, 1929. The *Chicago Defender* approvingly reported on another parade in Boston that included a participant calling himself “Sahara Lizzie” who “resplendent in yellow, purple, blue and orange with weird sleeve decoration . . . performed a wild dance along the route to the music of his own tambourine.” “Shriners End Fine Session in Bean City,” *Chicago Defender*, September 4, 1926.

89. Noble Drew Ali was particularly well placed to take advantage of this fraternal culture in the late 1920s, a time when fraternal orders had been secularized just enough that most Americans now associated them primarily with public service. Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, 148–84. The Shriners were the most successful of all the orders in adapting to the precedents set by the Rotary and Lions clubs due to their highly developed public relations skills, joyful character, and colorful parades, which won over public trust and plenty of funding for white Shriner Hospitals and black Shriners’ own charities. Indeed, membership in the Shriners boomed in the 1920s, their public profile becoming more prestigious every year. Fred Van Deventer, *Parade to Glory: The Story of the Shriners and Their Hospitals for Crip-
Appointed Children (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1959), 217–23. The Moors also appropriated the black fraternal tradition as a formal organizational style for the Moorish Science Temple, imitating the fraternal works of charity, community service, and mutual benefit which defined black respectability in interwar America. Publicly, the Moors staged the Moorish Science Temple as a fraternal order, holding parades, conclaves, and evenings of entertainment, such as Moorish costume balls, all of which were reported in the newspaper, not on the "Where to Worship" page, but alongside the Masons and Shriners in the main news pages of the paper.


92. 100 Years of Love, 2; Root, Ancient Arabic Order, 41; al-Mahdi, Who Was Noble Drew Ali? 85. Popular tradition holds that Ali wore feathers in his turban to symbolize his Cherokee blood. Wilson, Sacred Drift, 28.

93. See, for example, "Moorish Parade," Moorish Guide, October 26, 1928; and "Hold Session of Moorish Science Body," Chicago Defender, October 20, 1928.


96. "Off for London—High Highness, the Sultan of Zanzibar," Chicago Defender, June 1, 1929. Another story presented four black Muslim men from Aden who stated they had proof of their direct "descent from Abraham through Ishmael, his son, and Hagar, his wife, commonly known as the fore­runner of the Ethiopian race." The story goes on to claim that these men were Arabs to confirm "the old opinion of a double origin of the Arab race." "Trace Ancestry to Mighty Sampson," Chicago Defender, June 1, 1927; "Mohammedan Religion Spreads to Africa," Chicago Defender, April 28, 1928; "Endanger Christianity in Africa," Chicago Defender, October 20, 1928. Other articles documenting the spread of Islam in Africa and the United States were also widely circulated in, for example, the Messenger, published by black union leaders A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen, and Marcus Garvey's Negro World. A. T. Hoffert, "Moslem Propaganda: The Hand of Islam Stretches Out to Aframerica," The Messenger 9, no. 5 (May 1927): 141, 160; J. A. Rogers, "Bilal ibn Rahab—Warrior Priest," The Messenger 9, no. 6 (June, 1927): 214; Burkett, Garveyism as a Religious Movement, 180; St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton,


98. However, a significant portion of news articles portrayed Islam as militantly anti-Christian and spreading at an alarming pace through previously Christian parts of Africa and America. Blacks partial to black Spiritualism or other forms of alternative spirituality may have disregarded these articles as propaganda for white Christianity, of which they were suspicious in any event. "Sees Islam Making Bid for Converts," Chicago Defender, May 14, 1927; "Changing Religions," Chicago Defender, May 14, 1927; "Endanger Christianity in Africa," Chicago Defender, October 20, 1928.


100. Arthur Fauset reported in the early 1940s, "The members were also taught to believe that a sign, a star within a crescent moon, had been seen in the heavens, and that this betokened the arrival of the day of the Asiatics, and the destruction of the Europeans (whites)." Fauset, Black Gods of the Metropolis, 42.


103. Recall the Mason, Harris, mentioned above, who noted, "the confusion of the dialects . . . which is presumed to have given rise to the universal practice of conversing without speaking, and communications between Masons by tokens and signs," as a form of universal mystical communication. Harris, *Harris' Masonic Text-Book*, 10. See also Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood*, 12, 35, 62, 63; MacNulty, *Freemasonry*, 6; and Stevenson, *Origins of Freemasonry*, 80.

104. "Moorish Parade," *Moorish Guide*, October 26, 1928; "Hold Session of Moorish Science Body," *Chicago Defender*, October 20, 1928. Further, since at least the 1950s, some African American Muslims have viewed fraternal orders, in particular the Shriners, as a representation of Islamic ideas. Elijah Muhammad of the Nation of Islam criticized not only white but also African American Freemasons and Shriners, claiming fraternal symbols and rituals constituted a mockery of Islam. He argued whites had sold blacks this misrepresentation either out of ignorance or disingenuousness, causing blacks to be unable to take the religion of Islam seriously. Moreover, Ernest Allen has intriguingly discovered that Wallace Fard, early founder of the Nation of Islam, instructed members of the Nation, in the 1930s, that the Shriners were a white means of access to "Islamic" wisdom. Allen, "Identity and Destiny," 181; Mustafa El-Amin, *Al-Islam, Christianity & Freemasonry* (Jersey City, N.J.: New Mind Productions, 1985), 119; Mustafa El-Amin, *African-American Freemasons: Why They Should Accept Al-Islam* (Jersey City, N.J.: New Mind Productions, 1985), 24–25; Elijah Muhammad, *The Secrets of Freemasonry: That Which You Should Know* (Atlanta: Messenger Elijah Muhammad Propagation Society, 1994), 28–31, 38–39; Malcolm X and Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 161–62. Noble Drew Ali might have disagreed somewhat to argue that the esoteric message of transformation was nonetheless still to be found in the symbols and terminology of Masonry, if only one had the mystical guidance to see it. Al-Mahdi, *Who Was Noble Drew Ali?* 81–84.

known to be a freethinker and Mason and who did, in fact, visit the United States in the 1880s, though he might have been surprised to find his visit recorded in the popular tradition of such a movement as the Moorish Science Temple. It is difficult to say what kind of religious training Afghani would have theoretically given Ali's parents, since his views seem to have changed according to his audience. Nikki R. Keddie, *Iran: Religion, Politics and Society* (London: Frank Cass, 1980), 30–32.


107. Baer, *Black Spiritual Movement*, 92; Braden, *Spirits in Rebellion*, 13, 58; Braden, *These Also Believe*, 128–29; Robert S. Ellwood, Jr., *Alternative Altars: Unconventional and Eastern Spirituality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 87; Pike, *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry*, 25; Wilmshurst, *Meaning of Masonry*, 5. One modern observer of Noble Drew Ali, who likewise leads a fraternal/black Spiritualist-style religious group, has explained Ali's use of the word "science": "The word 'science' represents Noble Drew Ali's . . . belief that the black man's true culture is science, meaning Al Islaam is a science and through this science the black man can be independent of the white man in solving his problems . . . . The use of the word science is based upon the belief that everything finds its roots in mathematics. All the questions in the universe can be answered through the application of the 360 degrees of knowledge contained in the universe." Al-Mahdi, *Who Was Noble Drew Ali?* 16.


109. In particular, Moorish Science bears startlingly close resemblance to Father Hurley's Detroit-based Universal Hagar's Spiritual Church, which flourished between 1923 and the mid-1940s. Ali's teachings also bear a strong resemblance to some of the religious ideas presented by Marcus Garvey. Baer, *Black Spiritual Movement*, 82–109, 148; Burkett, *Garveyism as a Re-