

Introduction

Elijah Poole was born on October 7, 1897, near Sandersville, Georgia, to Wally and Marie Poole. In 1931, he met A. Wallace Fard Mohammed, who instructed him in religious theology. Poole accepted his teacher as Allah, the true God. He then dropped his surname and became Elijah Mohammed (or Muhammad, as he preferred), the Prophet of Allah. He began to teach the black community his understanding of Islam.

The Nation of Islam, an all-black organization, first appeared in Detroit in 1930. Under the leadership of Muhammad, its temples spread across the United States. His interpretation of the Koran taught that there was no such thing as a Negro; that so-called Negroes were slaves of the white race (called “white devils”) in the United States; and that the white race, because of its exploitations of the so-called Negroes, must and would be destroyed in the coming “War of Armageddon.” He further sought to establish an independent, black nation within the United States. During the birth of the civil rights movement in the 1950s, the Nation of Islam was deemed a subversive organization. The teachings of Elijah Muhammad came under the scrutiny of the FBI because he encouraged young people to evade the draft (registration under the Selective Service Act) because they owed no allegiance to the United States. Muhammad himself had been arrested in 1942 for failure to register with the Selective Service System.

These FBI files provide background into the life of Muhammad and follow his activities and teachings as the spiritual leader of the Nation of Islam from 1953 until his death in 1975. They also trace the role of the Nation of Islam as an influence during the civil rights struggle, which often found itself opposed to the “nonviolent” protest philosophy and direction of the main line movement. This program reveals the problems within the Nation of Islam, including the division that evolved between Muhammad and his second in command Malcolm X. And they profile

probably their most famous convert: prize-fighter Cassius Clay who became Muhammad Ali.

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This file is in approximate chronological order, and the FBI did not index documents. The Roll Notes is not a complete inventory of the file; however, it gives an indication of the types of material or specific documents that may be particularly worthwhile for research.