

**“FINDING W.D. FARD: UNVEILING THE IDENTITY OF THE FOUNDER OF THE NATION OF ISLAM”**

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The Nation of Islam (NOI) is an African American religious and political movement founded on a combination of elements of Islam and Black Nationalism. As proclaimed on the organization’s website, their main goal is: “...to teach the downtrodden and defenseless black people a thorough knowledge of God and of themselves, and to put them on the road to self-independence, with a superior culture and higher civilization than they had previously experienced”. Since its establishment in 1930, the NOI has attracted a great deal of attention from both the American and global publics, always having charismatic leaders at its forefront, such as Elijah Muhammad and Malik al Shabazz, better known as Malcolm X, but also boasting influential members, such as Muhammad Ali, one of the biggest names in boxing and the sports history in general. However, little is known about the man who started it, the founder and creator of the NOI, Wallace D. Fard. Canadian author John Andrew Morrow, a professor and academic, holding a PhD from the University of Toronto where he majored in Hispanic, Native and Islamic Studies, tried to fill this void with the book “Finding W.D. Fard: Unveiling the Identity of the Founder of the Nation of Islam,” and provide an answer to the question many have asked but failed to answer. Who was W.D. Fard?

Simply put, W.D. Fard is a mystery man. He is known to have had a lighter skin complexion and had used over fifty names, such as Wallace Don Ford, Fred Dodd, W.D Farad, Mohammad Wali, etc. He headed NOI from 1930 to 1934, when he mysteriously disappeared from the public stage. Most of the information about Fard comes from Elijah Muhammad, his student and successor at the helm of the movement, but the authenticity of the information he provided is questionable. In his book, Morrow cites Malcolm X, as a close associate to Elijah Muhammad at one point. Malcom X used to say that Elijah Muhammad’s views were prone to various alterations, which is why he cannot be regarded a credible conveyor of any information about W.D. Fard, or of the teaching propounded by the NOI founder. Morrow also writes that even Elijah Muhammad’s youngest son, Akbar Muhammad, a former student at the renowned Al-Azhar University in Cairo, and later a professor of Islamic Studies at the New York University, described his father’s teachings as “homemade Islam.”

Availing himself of a combination of primary and secondary sources, the author of this book, easily classified as a piece of qualitative research, presents almost every possible theory about the origin (including even the Albanian, which

points to the overlooked fact that the Albanians are intrinsically a Muslim nation),,, ideology, life, and even about the mystical disappearance of W. D. Fard, after having thoroughly examined credibility of each one individually. One of those theories is that Fard is actually the Mahdi, an imam who disappeared and will return to rule the world, and even that he was the reincarnation of Allah. Elijah Muhammad himself advocated this theory in his lectures. On the other hand, Morrow also provides a much more realistic view of W. D. Fard: a Muslim who came to America in the 1930s, like many other settlers, and found himself shocked by the conditions in which the African-Americans lived. He therefore offered them Islam as a solution to all their problems.

For many researchers, the religious doctrine of the founder of NOI is a particularly challenging issue. The author notes that Fard had studied a multitude of eastern and western teachings, and that his ideology had been influenced by many factors. Nevertheless, Morrow notes that the ideologies of Shi'ite Islam (Twelever, Isma'ilism, and even those of the extremist sect of Ghulat) were the prevailing influences. Morrow writes that many Salafists even accused NOI of being a heretical Shi'ite creation. Accordingly, there is a great possibility that W.D. Fard originated from a geographical area where Shi'ite Islam ideology was widespread, despite Elijah Muhammad's claims that W. D. Fard was born in Mecca, the holy place of Islam, on February 26, 1877. His birthday is still celebrated by the NOI members as a holiday called the Saviors' Day. John Andrew Morrow had already mentioned the potential affiliation between the NOI with Shi'ite Islam, in his article entitled "Malcolm X and Mohammad Mehdi: The Shi'a Connection?"<sup>1</sup>

The author of this book also lists several theories about the disappearance of W.D. Fard. Thus, he looks into whether Fard really disappeared as the Mahdi, the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam whose return is expected by the Muslim believers, or had simply decided to leave the US. Warith Deen Mohammed, also a son of Elijah Muhammad, claimed that W.D. Fard never disappeared but remained present all the while, and even kept in touch with his father, whom he advised on how to lead the African American Muslims.

Because of its platform, the NOI has often been the target of attacks by those who view it as a highly racist group, one which is not even Islamic. Critics of this movement have argued that Islam, as a religion, explicitly forbids any prominence of a race or a nation before one's religious affiliation, as cited in many verses of the Koran and the hadith. The NOI is linked with numerous scandals and controversies, which even placed it under the FBI scrutiny. Still, this organization always exerted a great impact on the American society, especially the Af-

1 In this article, written in 2012, John Andrew Morrow states that Malcolm X was on very friendly terms with Dr. Mohammad Taki Mehdi, an Iraqi Shi'ite, who not only organized Malcolm X's pilgrimage to Hajj, but was also his spiritual mentor. Certain members of Mohammad Mehdi's family later claimed that a well-known black rights and NOI activist, Malcolm X, had preached to his African-American followers about the life of Imam Husayn ibn Ali. If Malcolm X really considered Imam Husayn a role model, then we can argue with some confidence that he was heavily influenced by the Shi'ite ideology. See: Andrew J. Morrow, "Malcolm X and Mohammad Mehdi: The Shi'a Connection?", *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2012, pp. 5-24.

rican American population, and it would never have come into being were it not for W.D. Fard. Therefore, the study of his character and work is entirely justified, both in social and scientific terms. Throughout his book, John Andrew Morrow sought to record as much information about W.D. Fard as possible, but also to leave us the opportunity to create an image of the man ourselves, and thus take an active part in this research. Such an approach vests this book with a special importance. Also, even though at the first glance it might seem that the author has provided no conclusions of his own (although he did give us a few possible ones), the fact remains that through this research he has brought us closer than anyone before him to the mystery that is F.D. Fard. Lastly, owing to the information Morrow provided us, we believe that W.D. Fard was not a myth, but a man who really existed, and who left behind a number of clues that will give future researchers the opportunity to come to a final conclusion and unravel the mystery of who W.D. Fard really was.

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