



‘A Seed of Truth’: Ahmadiyya Muslim Propagation Networks and the Development of Islam in America

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‘A Seed of Truth’:
Ahmadiyya Muslim Propagation Networks
and the Development of Islam in America

by Aysha Khan

Advisor: Teren Sevea

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Introduction: Between India and Illinois

About 40 miles north of Chicago, on the shores of Lake Michigan, stands a small museum documenting the history of the city of Zion, Illinois. The building was the home of the city's founder, Rev. John Alexander Dowie (b. 1847), who founded Zion as a theocratic Christian utopia at the turn of the 20th century. A Congregational minister and charismatic faith healer, Dowie had become well-known in U.S. media when he founded the city with about 5,000 settlers. By the height of his ministry, he claimed some 50,000 followers. A pioneer of American Pentecostalism, he founded the millennialist Christian Catholic Apostolic Church, claiming to be the First Apostle of the church and the second coming of Elijah the Restorer.

Dowie frequently prayed for the "annihilation" of Islam, writing that the religion would ultimately "meet its end at the hands of Zion."¹ Curiously, many of the Zion Historical Society's visitors and supporters today are in fact a group of Muslims.

They are members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim sect, a controversial Islamic reform movement that emerged in South Asia and went on to produce "the very first global Muslim missionary network."² Ahmadis around the country see Zion almost as a holy site of pilgrimage, proof of their own prophet's victory over a false messiah and of their movement's early interactions with prominent Americans. And they see it as their religious duty to keep alive the story of Dowie's divinely-ordained downfall as a sign for the West.

¹ Anwer Mahmood Khan, *Fulfillment of a Grand Prophecy* (2000), 9-12.

² Eric Germain, "'Jihadists of the Pen' in Victorian England," in *Twenty-First Century Jihad*, eds. E. Kendall and E. Stein (I.B.Tauris, 2015), 304.

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (b. 1835), the Ahmadiyya sect's Indian founder and an outspoken defender of Islam against Christian and Hindu polemicists, took issue with Dowie's insults to Islam and claims to prophethood. In 1902, Ghulam Ahmad wrote to Dowie challenging him to a mubahala, an Islamic prayer duel to the death. The true prophet would outlive the imposter, Ghulam Ahmad prophesied, warning that ignoring the challenge would cause "calamity" for Zion City.³ Such mubahalas were among the community's earliest strategies for engaging with the West, working to critique Christianity and bring about an encounter with Islam.

Dowie dismissed the challenge from the "Mohammaden Messiah," replying in his church publication, "Do you imagine that I shall reply to such gnats and flies?"⁴ But in 1907, Dowie died. It was a year before Ghulam Ahmad's death and nearly two weeks after Ghulam Ahmad published a revelation which he said heralded his victory. Dowie died bankrupt and paralyzed, abandoned by most of his disciples after having been exposed in the press as a fornicator, embezzler, and alcoholic. Ahmadis remember Dowie's death in disgrace as a divine proof of its founder's truth, a sign specifically aimed at the Christians of the West. They commemorate the global press coverage of the episode as recognition of Islam's victory.

This moment has been lost from public memory of Islam in America and neglected by scholarship on the topic. But in Ahmadiyya memory, this prayer contest is among the earliest moments of the movement's story in the U.S., and indeed the story of Islam in America more broadly. Such transatlantic engagements were occurring decades before the first Ahmadiyya

³ Anwer Mahmood Khan, "Challenge to Alexander Dowie," *The Review of Religions*, 99, no. 2 (April 2004): 14. <https://www.reviewofreligions.org/891/challenge-to-alexander-dowie>.

⁴ Khan, *Fulfillment of a Grand Prophecy*, 10.

missionary to the U.S., Mufti Muhammad Sadiq (b. 1872), arrived in Philadelphia and began establishing mosques and gaining American converts by the hundreds in the 1920s. His efforts produced the “first successful national missionary network of mosques and Islamic centers in the United States,” helping shape the contours of American Islam as we know it.⁵

The reformist sect's contributions to the development of American Islam are frequently sidelined or diminished, in part due to sectarianism, both by Muslims as well as non-Muslim scholars. But the Ahmadiyya movement has been central to building American awareness of Islam, in the press and among intellectual circles, as mainstream news coverage of the prayer duel with Dowie showed; in building some of the country's early Islamic institutions, including several historic publications and mosques from Chicago to Washington, D.C.; in spreading its universalist vision of Islam and critiques of Christianity among Americans of various religious, racial, ethnic and class backgrounds; and in influencing the development of black American Islamic theologies, including through its English-language literature and notions of ongoing prophecy. The scholarship that does recognize the movement's role tends to focus on Mufti Sadiq's efforts, producing a Great Man history that is insufficient and incomplete. Looking at the Dowie case and the countless other circulations, connections, and linkages to and from Ahmadiyya networks can take us away from this single history and toward a more thorough understanding of Islamization, religious authority, transnationalism, missionization, and Islamic theologies in the U.S.

⁵ Patrick D. Bowen, "Satti Majid: A Sudanese Founder of American Islam," *Journal of Africana Religions* 1, no. 2 (2013): 197.

Since the 1880s, as American intellectuals became increasingly open to alternative spirituality and world religions, the Ahmadiyya movement's leaders have been actively observing and strategically engaging with the American religious landscape, from Theosophy to the Nation of Islam. "Ahmadiyya was unquestionably one of the most significant movements in the history of Islam in the United States in the 20th century, providing as it did the first multi-racial model for American Islam," Richard Brent Turner writes. "The Ahmadiis disseminated Islamic literature and converted black and white Americans. They attacked the distortions of Islam in the media, established mosques and reading rooms, and translated the Quran into English."⁶

Seeking to challenge "Christians' exclusive claims to universality, rationality, and progress,"⁷ Ghulam Ahmad and his heirs have worked to shape the contours of American religious culture through written correspondence, transnational travel, prolific participation in the American press, engagements with American political and religious movements, the development of rich networks of missionaries and preachers, and extensive publication and dissemination of much of the first and most widely-available English-language Islamic literature in the U.S.

These exchanges and encounters criss-crossed the Atlantic, involving figures who affiliated with Sunnism, Shi'ism, Sufism, Ahmadiyyat (both its Qadian-based majority as well as its Lahori splinter group), the Nation of Islam, the Moorish Science Temple, and beyond. It

⁶ Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African American Experience* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2003), 100.

⁷ Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 209.

includes both women and men, the intellectual elite and the uneducated underclass, blacks, whites, South Asians, Arabs, Turks, and more. These encounters were neither one-way nor were they linear. Converts, curious sojourners, and journalists visited Ghulam Ahmad and his successors in Punjab, and Ghulam Ahmad and his missionaries initiated correspondence with and responded to letters from Americans curious about Islam and his vision of it.

Taking these discourses, engagements and influences into account, this paper asks: How has sectarianism flattened public memory of early American Islam and its pioneers? How can focusing on networks, engagements and influences complicate our understanding of U.S. Islam's historical figures, institutions and movements? And how might it look to write a history of Islam's development in the U.S. that places the Ahmadiyya movement at its center rather than its periphery?

Sectarianism and Ahmadiyya History

The Ahmadiyya Movement

The Ahmadiyya Muslim reformist movement emerged in British colonial India in the late 19th century in a moment of crisis for South Asian Muslims. Ghulam Ahmad, who resided in the city of Qadian in the Punjab region, was a devoted worshipper and student of Islam from a Sufi-oriented family. A bookish scholar, prolific writer, and outspoken defender of Islam who frequently engaged in debates with opponents, he sought to shake Muslims from their stupor, urging them to engage with Islam with both their souls and intellect. With Muslims increasingly overcome by the growing influence of Christian missionaries and the Hindu Arya Samaj, Ghulam Ahmad frequently railed against the religious scholarly class. He accused the ulema of

moral degredation, of corrupting Islam and abdicating their responsibilities to guide the Muslim masses, leaving them vulnerable to the ploys of Christian missionaries. Ghulam Ahmad sought to undo the moral decay he saw. His writings promoted a rationalist, universalist approach to religion that emphasized spiritual transformation through the Quran and hadith (traditions of the Prophet Muhammad) while competing with Christian evangelism.

In his youth, he had begun receiving revelations, dreams and visions. In the 1880s, he published a circular declaring himself the mujadid, or reformer of the century, and began calling upon Muslims to take an oath of allegiance at his hands. This marked the formal beginning of the Ahmadiyya movement as a Sufi-style spiritual order. Ghulam Ahmad later announced that God had told him he also fulfilled the role of the mahdi, an end-times figure awaited by Muslims; the spiritual second coming of the messiah awaited by Jews and Christians⁸; as well as Hindus' awaited Avatar. He further declared that the door to prophecy had not closed with the Prophet Muhammad, as most Muslims hold, but that he himself had been appointed a prophet by God.⁹ While Ghulam Ahmad's practice was extremely similar to that of Sunni orthodoxy, adhering to the same declaration of faith and so-called five pillars,

⁸ Ahmadis contest the widespread Muslim belief that Jesus was not crucified and was raised bodily to heaven, where he awaits his return before the Day of Judgment. Instead, Ghulam Ahmad argued, Jesus survived the crucifixion, then migrated eastward to spread his message to the Lost Tribes of Israel. He posited that Jesus died of natural causes in Kashmir, where Ghulam Ahmad identified his likely tomb. For Ghulam Ahmad's full theory, see his 1899 treatise *Jesus in India* (Urdu: *Masih Hindustain Mein*). Burying Jesus undermined Christian scripture, showed that the Prophet Muhammad's death did not make him inferior to Jesus, and opened the door for Ghulam Ahmad's claim that he himself metaphorically fulfilled the Islamic prophecy of Jesus' second coming.

⁹ Most Muslims interpret the Quranic description of the Prophet Muhammad as "seal of the prophets" (*khatam-un-nabiyeen*) to mean that he was the absolute final prophet. Ahmadis understand it to mean he was the greatest prophet and final law-bearing prophet. Ghulam Ahmad claimed to be a subordinate prophet to the Prophet Muhammad, a shadow (*zill*) and reflection (*buruz*) of him, with the mission of bringing the followers of all previous prophets into the universal religion of Islam and clarifying misunderstandings of Islamic teachings, such as jihad.

hundreds of local Islamic scholars responded by signing a fatwa ruling him a disbeliever. Ghulam Ahmad and his followers engaged in an extensive literary and proselytizing campaign, subverting “European Christian dominance” and “establishing Islam in the Christian West.”¹⁰ They distributed tens of thousands of flyers and mailed invitations to religious leaders and intellectuals in the U.S. and Europe, inviting them to visit Qadian to witness the divine signs of his truth. These signs included prophecies of an eclipse, of World War I, of his son’s birth, and his victories in prayer duels such as the one with Dowie. For Ghulam Ahmad and his followers, this work was the fulfillment of the Prophet Muhammad’s prophecy that the mahdi would “break the cross.” Soon, this evangelistic agenda became a major missionary enterprise. As the movement’s head of foreign missions said decades later: “The task of shattering the Cross to pieces demanded that just as Christian missionaries had been penetrating to the nooks and corners of the earth, Ahmadi Muslim missionaries should roll the tide back and carry the fight into the homelands of the Christians themselves.”¹¹

After Ghulam Ahmad’s first successor died in 1914, the movement faced a bitter schism. The majority Ahmadiyya community, based in Qadian and called *Jamaat-i-Ahmadiyya*, holds that Ghulam Ahmad claimed prophethood and instituted a caliphate to succeed him. But a faction of Ghulam Ahmad’s followers based in Lahore, known as the *Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat-i-Islam*, rejects both claims. The Lahoris accept Ghulam Ahmad as a reformer rather than a prophet and do not draw a boundary between themselves and Sunnism.

¹⁰ Fatimah Fanusie, “Ahmadi, Beboppers, Veterans, and Migrants: African American Islam in Boston, 1948–1963,” in *The African Diaspora and the Study of Religion*, ed. Theodore Louis Trost (United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2007), 52.

¹¹ Mirza Mubarak Ahmad, *Our Foreign Missions* (Rabwah, Pakistan: The Ahmadiyya Muslim Foreign Missions Office, 1961), v.

But both communities have continued to engage in robust evangelism across the globe, a mandate that emerges from Ahmadis' distinct understanding of jihad.¹² The Ahmadiyya movement was notable for its belief that Islam only permits defensive wars and that the Islamic injunction of armed jihad, considered the "smaller jihad," does not generally apply within the conditions of modernity. Ghulam Ahmad instead underscored the "greater jihad," the spiritual disciplining and purification of one's soul, and the "great jihad," the peaceful propagation of Islamic teachings particularly through the pen. "God the Almighty says in the Holy Quran that you should make preparations to defend yourselves with the same kind of weapons as the opponents happen to use," he reminded his followers. "Think of the preparations that the opponents of Islam are now making. They are not lining up the armies. They are publishing magazines and books. We also should, therefore, pick up our pen and answer their attacks with magazines and books."¹³ Indeed, Ghulam Ahmad further pointed to the proliferation of printing presses by the mid-19th century as divine assistance.¹⁴

In the Ahmadiyya worldview, polemics, prose and peaceful propagation supersede the sword; working to purify one's own soul and propagate the Quran's true teachings through rational arguments are both acts of jihad incumbent upon all Muslims. This print jihad became the core of the Ahmadiyya missionary project. Ghulam Ahmad himself authored nearly 90 books in Urdu, Arabic, and Persian. He launched multiple magazines, participated in interfaith

¹² For more on Ghulam Ahmad's distinctive notions of peaceful jihad and the Mahdi as a figure who brings an end to war, see chapter 8 of Yohanan Friedmann's *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and Its Medieval Background* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

¹³ Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, *Malfoozat*, vol. 8 (1984), 20.

¹⁴ "This is God's act so that He may assist in my task and may spread my teachings and my books and convey to every nation the wisdom contained in my writings so that they may listen and be guided." Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, *Aina-e-Kamalat-e-Islam* (1893) in *Ruhani Khazain*, Vol. 5: 473.

conferences, and was a prolific poet, pamphleteer, speaker, debater, and mail correspondent who engaged with thinkers and high-profile figures around the world. Many among his community have followed suit. The movement, then, views its successful proselytization and growth in the face of opposition as a mark of its truth. “I have come only to sow the seed which has been planted by my hand,” he wrote. “It shall now grow and flourish and there is none who can hinder its growth.”¹⁵

Many, though, have tried. While the movement now spans over 200 countries, Ahmadis face intense, often deadly, persecution around the world. Countless fatwas have declared them outside the fold of Islam and, among some extremists, *wajib al-qatl* (mandatory to kill). Ahmadis are officially banned from entering Saudi Arabia and performing the hajj and umrah pilgrimages. In Pakistan, where most of Ghulam Ahmad’s followers immigrated after South Asia’s Partition, the constitution declares all Ahmadis to be non-Muslims. The penal code explicitly criminalizes Ahmadis propagating their faith, saying the Islamic greeting, building mosques, or otherwise “indirectly or directly posing as a Muslim.” Pakistani Muslims applying for passports must sign a statement saying they consider Ghulam Ahmad to be an “imposter” and Ahmadis to be non-Muslim. This marginalization from both the state and religious scholarly class emboldens ongoing anti-Ahmadiyya vigilante killings and mob attacks.¹⁶ It has

¹⁵ Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, *Tadhkiratush Shahadatain*, 64.

<https://www.alislam.org/book/narrative-two-martyrdoms/some-words-advice-community/>

¹⁶ Ahmad Najib Burhani, “‘It’s a Jihad’: Justifying Violence towards the Ahmadiyya in Indonesia,” *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 9, no. 1 (May 2021): 99–112.

also informed statements from major U.S. Muslim leaders, including Sheikh Hamza Yusuf, who have publicly declared Ahmadis to be disbelievers on these grounds.¹⁷

The State of the Scholarship

As Kambiz GhaneaBassiri writes, “American Muslim history is a history of Muslim and non-Muslim American encounters and exchanges” that underscore how Islam and the West are “lived traditions that have been varying thought and re-thought in relation to one another.”¹⁸ The pivotal role of the Ahmadiyya community in the development of Islam and Islamic institutions in America within these exchanges is not widely known among American Muslims. When acknowledged, the sectarian slant is strong.

“The Ahmadiyya Movement...presenting themselves as ‘Muslims,’ were the first to respond to the African Americans’ situation,” reads one history of early American Islam featured in a popular magazine published by the Islamic Society of North America, a Sunni organization. “They published the *Moslem Sunrise*...the newspaper turned out to be the earliest and longest-running American ‘Muslim’ publication.”¹⁹ The quotation marks around “Muslim” in this article by a Sunni scholar of Islamic history are pregnant with sectarian implications. Another article presenting a historical overview of Islamic communication and propagation in America mentioned pioneering Ahmadiyya endeavors in a single sentence describing *The*

¹⁷ Hamza Yusuf, “Sticks and Drones May Break Our Bones, but Fitna Really Hurts Us,” *Sandala* (blog), October 6, 2012, sandala.org/blogs/uncategorized/sticks-and-drones-may-break-our-bones-but-fitna-really-hurts-us.

¹⁸ GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America*, 9.

¹⁹ Amaddou Shakur, “Islam in America: The Middle Period 1900-1950,” *Islamic Horizons* 45, no. 3 (May/June 2016): 41, https://issuu.com/isnacreative/docs/ih_may-jun_16.

Moslem Sunrise as one of several “publications by sects who claimed to be Muslim.”²⁰ In the American Mosque Study, a decennial statistical survey conducted since 2000, Muslim researchers surveyed both Sunni and Twelver Shi’i houses of worship. But as a matter of methodology, their survey excluded “organizations outside of the mainstream of the American Muslim community like the Nation of Islam, Moorish Science Temple, Ismailis, and Ahmadiyyah.”²¹ Theological, gender, race and class dynamics have likely been misunderstood, misrepresented, and erased because of this classification; while 33 percent of mosques [surveyed](#) did not have women’s activities, for instance, all Ahmadiyya mosques have a policy of designating separate prayer spaces, programs, and leadership roles for women.

The same sectarian boundary-making and -policing that motivate persecution in South Asia have bled into Western scholarship from Muslim and non-Muslim scholars alike. The first Ahmadiyya missionary to the U.S., Mufti Muhammad Sadiq, remains the most successful 20th century Muslim missionary in America, converting hundreds of individuals and sowing the seeds of an extensive network of Islamic figures, publications, circulations, and theologies that tapped into religious, racial, political, economic and class dynamics of the time. But his legacy goes largely unrecognized by Sunni student-travelers today, who do not see him or other Ahmadiyya scholars and missionaries as “legitimate predecessors.” Historians often implicitly

²⁰ Abdul Hamid Lotfi, “Spreading the Word: Communicating Islam in America,” in *Muslim Minorities in the West*, eds. Yvonne Haddad and Jane Smith (United Kingdom: AltaMira Press, 2002), 4.

²¹ Ihsan Bagby, “The American Mosque 2020: Growing and Evolving Report 2 of the US Mosque Survey 2020: Perspectives and Activities,” The Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, June 2021, 4, <https://www.ispu.org/report-2-mosque-survey-2020>. Following some public pushback, the text was subsequently amended on June 29, 2021 to say the survey “did not include organizations outside of the Sunni and Shi’ite American Muslim community like the Nation of Islam, Moorish Science Temple, Ismailis, and Ahmadiyyah,” though Ismailis also are part of the broader Shi’ite community.

or explicitly “reproduce the same normative exclusionary practices” by characterizing Sadiq as a “heterodox” or “proto-Muslim” preacher.²² Take Muhacit Bilici’s study of the Americanization of Islam in *Finding Mecca in America*, which contains no mention of the Ahmadiyya movement or its central figures. Or see Larry Poston’s nearly 200-page review of Muslim missionary activity and Islamic conversion, *Islamic Da’wah in the West*, which treats Sadiq’s landmark efforts with a single sentence more than halfway into the book.²³ He characterizes Ahmadiyya proselytization efforts as “nonorthodox” and “unashamedly” imitating the Christian methods,²⁴ writing, “The question may be raised as to whether adherence to the Ahmadiyya may truly be considered adherence to Islam. But the Ahmadiyya Movement was included in the discussion of offensive-activist groups and its conversion dynamics are therefore significant.”²⁵ Poston downplays Ahmadiyya conversions, writing that the movement’s literature included testimony from Muhammad Alexander Russell Webb, someone who “it is certain...had no connection whatsoever with the movement.”²⁶ In fact, as we will explore, the engagement between Webb and Ahmadiyyat was quite rich. Such descriptions and elisions are characteristic of many academic introductions to the movement.

In a chapter examining a 1923 photograph of four Ahmadis that is the first known group photo of Muslim American women, Sylvia Chan-Malik’s cultural history *Being Muslim* notes that the “scholarly inattention” to early black Ahmadiyya women who joined the movement

²² Zareena Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 95.

²³ Larry Poston, *Islamic Da’wah in the West: Muslim Missionary Activity and the Dynamics of Conversion to Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 112.

²⁴ Poston, *Islamic Da’wah in the West*, 115.

²⁵ Poston, *Islamic Da’wah in the West*, 162.

²⁶ Poston, *Islamic Da’wah in the West*, 163.

emerges from the mainstream notion that Ahmadis are not only not 'real' Muslims but infidels who corrupt the teachings of Islam.²⁷ The omission of the movement "has contributed to the making of an implicitly masculinist narrative of Islam in the early twentieth century," she argues. "To initiate a story of U.S. American Islam with the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam and the Four American Moslem Ladies calls for alternative, markedly different historical narratives." Indeed, erasure of the movement has left out of the narrative black Ahmadiyya women such as Mubarika Malik, who was a candidate to represent Wisconsin's 5th congressional District, and who in 1974 presented President Gerald Ford with a copy of the Quran during a meeting on national issues. It has also ignored women like Siddiqatun Nisa Rahatullah, formerly Ella May Garber, a white woman who had become Sufi but converted to Ahmadiyyat in 1901 after Sadiq began exchanging letters with her. Through writing poems and songs to use in Ahmadiyya preaching campaigns and for publication in Ahmadiyya journals, she became a leading figure in the U.S. movement. After moving to Detroit and becoming what the local press dubbed "the first female Muslim missionary to preach Islam and the Holy Quran in the United States of America," she planned to travel to Qadian for religious training.²⁸ A rewriting of history that places the movement at the center of the development of Islam in America therefore seems not only reasonable but productive, offering a narrative of American Islam that is less Sunni-centric and masculine, and more transnational and multiracial.

²⁷ Sylvia Chan-Malik, *Being Muslim: A Cultural History of Women of Color in American Islam*, (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 45.

²⁸ "100 Years Ago... – First female missionary of Islam in America," Al Hakam, May 21, 2021, <https://www.alhakam.org/100-years-ago-first-female-missionary-of-islam-in-america>. (This translation of *Al Fazl's* original May 19, 1921 report in Urdu includes the original text of an article reportedly from the March 13, 1921 edition of *Detroit News*.)

Of course, the critical role of the movement in U.S. Muslim history has been documented by several scholars in some of the field's most influential works. Among the most important of these books are Amina Beverly McCloud's 1995 *African American Islam*, Richard Brent Turner's 1997 *Islam and the African-American Experience*, Robert Dannin's 2002 *Black Pilgrimage to Islam*, Michael Gomez's 2005 *Black Crescent*, GhaneaBassiri's 2010 *A History of Islam in America*, Sally Howell's 2014 *Old Islam in Detroit*, and several by Edward Curtis IV.

Several of these influential books cordon off the sect's history into studies of Black Muslim history. The community is thus popularly depicted as another "proto-Islamic" movement that flourished mostly among African Americans, rarely mentioned outside the context of the Nation of Islam and Moorish Science Temple. This raises the question of whether the sectarian gatekeeping by American Muslims and Western scholars is solely due to influences from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and other foreign authorities policing Islam. American Muslims' instinct to distinguish Ahmadiyyat from "real" Islam is connected to U.S. Muslims' own racial hierarchies and the movement's associations with black Muslim groups commonly described as "proto-Islamic" or "heterodox." But while scholars have taken up in-depth studies of the Nation of Islam and Moorish Science Temple's histories, the Ahmadiyya movement in the Americas has never been the main focus of any in-depth academic study.

The movement in the U.S has largely been examined by scholars with expertise in African American and alternative religious movements and American Islam, rather than with expertise in South Asian or transnational religion. The result seems to be that the movement's South Asian origins, institutions and Urdu-language literature is neglected. Nile Green, a

historian of South Asian Muslim communities, is a rare scholar who has examined the community's U.S. mission through a study of Urdu-language sources, particularly an untranslated hagiography known as *Lata'if-e-Sadiq*. His chapter "Making Islam in the Motor City," from *Terrains of Exchange*, examines how Sadiq drew upon British colonial proselytization techniques and technologies in South Asia for his missionary work in Detroit. Still, like most scholars looking at the movement, he segregates the Ahmadiyya mission into a separate chapter, and the sole focus of his study is Sadiq's mission.

Indeed, many scholars use the arrival of Sadiq, the first Ahmadiyya missionary, in the U.S. in 1920 as a starting point for a second wave of Islam in America (the first wave having occurred during the transatlantic slave trade). But the Ahmadiyya movement is often diminished in these histories or presented as a precursor to a purer or more legitimate Islam, reproducing sectarian boundaries between orthodox and heterodox. Furthermore, they almost uniformly fail to capture the breadth of the movement beyond Sadiq and his successors' early work proselytizing to African Americans — including its involvement in an intermediary wave of Islam in America that occurred among white intellectuals amid an occult revival and Orientalist fascination with Eastern spirituality.

The history of the Ahmadiyya movement's engagements with the U.S begins much earlier than most of these historians, anthropologists and religious studies scholars chronicle. Their treatment of the Ahmadiyya movement nearly always begins with and exclusively focuses upon Sadiq and his three-and-a-half year mission in the U.S. The surprising lack of academic attention to the unique trans-Atlantic prayer duel challenge with Dowie demonstrates the

shortcomings of scholarship on the movement. None of the books listed above mentioned the incident at Zion.²⁹ This longer history of Ahmadiyya engagement with Americans and American press, as well as Ahmadi's role in the development of early Muslim institutions and American Muslim theologies, have all been neglected and erased from public memory of American Islam.

Ahmadi networks stretched all over the globe by the early 20th century, with missionaries establishing themselves in England, Germany, Ghana and Indonesia. Some scholars have noted that "the corpus of literature produced by the movement makes the Ahmadiyya the best documented religious movement in modern Islam," helping shape the contours of modern Islamic thought in Southeast Asia and other regions where their missions were active.³⁰ While there have been deeper studies in the persecution of the movement and its distinct theologies, these discursive, intellectual, cultural, and educational exchanges have not been thoroughly analyzed. Network analysis in Islamic studies is an emerging field, increasingly becoming a popular avenue for re-examining religious cultures and histories. Major studies of global Islam in this emerging field, including Scott Reese's *Imperial Muslims* and Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal's anthology *Oceanic Islam*, frequently miss the involvement of Ahmadiyya evangelism and reformism within these networks. And few studies of American Islam have adopted a network-based approach. Mapping these webs and studying these nodes

²⁹ S. Kaazim Naqvi's 2019 book *Chicago Muslims and the Transformation of American Islam: Immigrants, African Americans, and the Building of the American Ummah* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019) may be the only text on American Islam that examines the Dowie incident.

³⁰ Iqbal Singh Sevea, "The Ahmadiyya Print Jihad in South and Southeast Asia," in *Islamic Connections*, eds. R. Michael Feener and Terenjit Sevea, (ISEAS Publishing, 2009), 135.

in American Islam, rather than counting converts and tracking formal affiliation, could help undo the Arab Sunni male hegemony in mainstream narratives of this history.

Drafting an Alternative History of Islam in America

On the morning of April 7, 1908, just two months before Ghulam Ahmad died, a couple from Chicago arrived in the city of Qadian. Mr. George Turner and his wife made their way to Masjid Mubarak, where they introduced themselves as tourists and requested to meet with Ghulam Ahmad, the Indian messiah whose claims they had heard so much about. With Mufti Sadiq serving as an interpreter, the couple engaged in a lengthy dialogue with the messiah about his prayer duel challenge to Dowie, the faith healer who had set up a Christian theocracy in their very state. “Why did you put forth this challenge? What are the truthful arguments of your claim?” they asked, as recorded in Ghulam Ahmad’s published discourses.³¹

“Along with thousands of signs, Dowie’s incident which took place in your own country, if you ponder, is enough,” Ghulam Ahmad responded. “Then we wrote to him on this matter, but he would not desist in his cause. Finally after we received word from God, we foretold his ruin and his failure. This prophecy was required to be fulfilled within my lifetime...he, according to the prophecy, perished in extreme disgrace and torment.” Their visit from the great United State of America to his small, previously anonymous town was further proof of his truth, he asserted: “Where is America, and where is Qadian?”

³¹ Ghulam Ahmad, *Malfoozat* (1988) vol. 5, 513-521, translated and quoted in Awwab Saad Hayat’s “Coming from every distant track: A couple from Chicago,” *Al Hakam*, Jan. 15, 2021, <https://www.alhakam.org/coming-from-every-distant-track-a-couple-from-chicago>. These discourses, compiled by Sadiq and two of Ghulam Ahmad’s other companions, have not been translated in full.

Interactions such as these have been entirely neglected from academic examinations of the Ahmadiyya movement and its role in American Islam. Nearly all scholarship on the Ahmadiyya movement in the U.S. focuses on its engagement with African Americans amid the Great Migration, examining Sadiq and his historic mission, in which he set up America's longest running Islamic magazine and one of its first mosques. But the story of Ahmadiyyat in the U.S. is not the story of a single figure, but one that emerges from networks, engagements and interactions of movements, institutions and ideas across cities and continents. Studying the networks of students and teachers that emerged from Sadiq and other Ahmadiyya missionaries' mission provides a much fuller picture.

As this couple's discussion with Ghulam Ahmad shows, Ahmadiyya engagement with Americans began with white intellectuals through correspondence and the press, years before Sadiq's arrival in Philadelphia. It was not long after Ghulam Ahmad issued his prayer duel challenge to Dowie that American and European newspapers began to feature the unique episode. Ghulam Ahmad compiled a list of thirty American and British newspapers covering it which were sent to him; many published portraits of Ghulam Ahmad and his original challenge.³² Among these were the New York *Literary Digest's* article "Rival Messiahs in a Proposed Prayer Duel" and the *Chicago Interpreter's* "Will Dowie Come Forward For This Duel?"

The final years of Dowie's life saw scandals over Zion's finances and his eventual ousting. Dowie's death in disgrace sparked further bursts of national and international coverage of the Indian messiah's mubahala challenge. "Great is Mirza Ghulam Ahmad The Messiah:

³² Khan, *Fulfillment of a Grand Prophecy*, 13.

Foretold pathetic end of Dowie – and now he predicts plague, flood and earthquake,” announced a full-page spread in Boston’s Sunday Herald magazine, published June 23, 1907. The news clipping, which Ahmadiyya preachers today pass out in brochures as a religious proof text and proselytization tool, features a full-page portrait of Ghulam Ahmad standing with the sun rising behind the silhouettes of minarets and domes. For many Ahmadis, the publication of this illustration from a major newspaper in Boston, an intellectual and cultural hub in the U.S., evokes the Prophet Muhammad’s eschatological hadith: “The Hour will not be established till the sun rises from the West; and when it rises (from the West) and the people see it, they all will believe.”³³ Many Ahmadis interpret this tradition as prophecying the West’s acceptance of Islam, which they see the Zion *mubahala*, and Sadiq’s work later, as hearkening. It is this hadith to which *The Moslem Sunrise* journal’s title refers.

Indeed, the movement saw the results of the prayer duel and this coverage as a unique sign for American and European readers to see Ghulam Ahmad’s truth at close range. “Distance of place like distance of time divests an event of much of its reality,” the English-language magazine *The Review of Religions*, founded by Ghulam Ahmad, acknowledged in a 1907 article. But in the case of this prophecy, the editors wrote, “the element of remoteness is not present” for its English and American readers.³⁴ There was no excuse left for white Christian America to not see the truth.

³³ Naveed Malik, “The Meaning of the Prophecy ‘the Sun Shall Rise from the West,’” *The Muslim Sunrise*, April 13, 2020,

<https://muslimsunrise.com/2020/04/13/the-meaning-of-the-prophecy-the-sun-shall-rise-in-the-west>.

³⁴ Khan, *Fulfillment of a Grand Prophecy*, 17.

Americans with an interest in religion were taking notice. Mr. Turner and his wife were not the only Americans to visit Qadian. D.D. Dickinson, a prominent Presbyterian minister and scholar, stayed at Ghulam Ahmad's home in 1901 and spoke with him on Islam's teachings, with Sadiq again serving as an interpreter. More than one hundred English-language publications covered the *mubahala*, from the New York Times to the Honolulu Advertiser. An Episcopal Theological School professor in 1929 published a paper in Harvard Theological Review on the movement's Western propaganda, which noted the challenge to Dowie and other prayer duels as the "most original of all his [Ghulam Ahmad's] miracles."³⁵

A Webb of Influences

Shortly before Dowie's death, Ghulam Ahmad received a letter from a white journalist and newspaper publisher in America named Alexander Russell Webb (b. 1846). "He stated that Dr. Dowie lives a lifestyle of lords and princes in this country and despite his respect and popularity....this prophecy was publicized in all of America and Europe," Ghulam Ahmad wrote in 1907.³⁶ Webb, who took the name "Muhammad" after converting, has become known as the earliest Anglo-American convert to Islam. He was not the first but was certainly the most renowned, having been dubbed by the press of the time as the "Yankee Mohammadan" and "apostle" of Islam in America. In 1893, Webb served as the first Muslim representative to speak at the World Parliament of Religions, a watershed interreligious dialogue hosted in Chicago. The event, which was central to the institutionalization of the field of world religions, famously offered thousands of Americans an introduction to Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Chinese

³⁵ James Thayer Addison, "The Ahmadiya Movement and its Western Propaganda," *Harvard Theological Review* 22, no. 1 (1929): 11-12. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816000000468>.

³⁶ Khan, *Fulfillment of a Grand Prophecy*, 11.

religions and promoted interest in interreligious dialogue and understanding. It also served as a national introduction to Islam, with Webb representing both the faith but also the possibility of an American Islam. This moment, then, cements both Islam's place within the world religions framework and its place as, potentially, an American religion. And the Ahmadiyya movement, too, is linked to both of these developments.

In 1872, Webb had renounced Christianity and begun a study of alternative philosophies and Eastern spirituality, eventually embracing Theosophy and Buddhism.³⁷ In 1886, scholars believe, he likely encountered an advertisement for one of Ghulam Ahmad's books in an English-language newspaper; this may have been a circular about Ghulam Ahmad's magnum opus, *Barahin-e-Ahmadiyya* ("Arguments of Ahmad"), which Ghulam Ahmad had sent to the magazine *Theosophist* and had been reprinted in its pages.³⁸ While Webb had certainly heard of Islam prior, "Until this time Webb had given little attention to Islam, but now he was intrigued and wanted to learn more and thus started a correspondence with Ahmad."³⁹ Webb wrote Ghulam Ahmad an impassioned letter, marking his first clear step toward Islam. In the correspondence, some of which Ghulam Ahmad published in his book *Shahne-e-Haqq*, Webb made a remarkable offer to serve as Ghulam Ahmad's deputy in the U.S., writing:

...a visit to India being out of the question it occurred to me that I might through your aid assist in spreading the truth here. If, as you say the Muhammadan is the only true religion why could I not act as its Apostle or promulgator in America ... If I could know what Muhammad really taught that was superior to the teachings of others, I could then be in a position to defend and promulgate the Muhammadan religion above all others ...

³⁷ Umar F. Abd-Allah, *A Muslim in Victorian America: The Life of Alexander Russell Webb*. (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, USA, 2006), 52.

³⁸ Bowen, *History of Conversion*, 1:102.

³⁹ Brent D. Singleton. "Minarets in Dixie: Proposals to Introduce Islam in the American South1." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 26, no. 3 (December 2006): 1. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602000601141448>.

If you can lead me to its blessed light you will find me not only a willing pupil but an anxious one.⁴⁰

Webb offered to have Ghulam Ahmad's circulars printed in a leading U.S. newspaper, writing that Americans were particularly interested in Eastern religions at the moment and that it could be Ghulam Ahmad through whom the faith could be introduced in the U.S. Indeed, Webb was soon able to have the New York Tribune publish one of Ghulam Ahmad's circulars.⁴¹

In 1888, Webb formally accepted Islam while serving in the Philippines as the U.S. consul general. Within a few years, he had resigned, set on setting up an Islamic mission in the U.S. He set sail to India for a tour, seeking to raise funds for the launch of his Muslim propaganda effort in America. Echoing Ahmadiyya rhetoric about turning the tables on the Western world through a spiritual colonization, Webb wrote to Indian Muslims from whom he was requesting donations: "The Christians spend millions of dollars every year to spread their false religion in the Orient; why cannot the Musselmans spend a few thousands to spread the true faith here?"⁴² While in India, Webb and his companions – one of whom, Hassan Ali, likely later became a follower of Ghulam Ahmad – weighed whether to visit Qadian to meet Ghulam Ahmad following his controversial messianic claim. According to Ahmadiyya sources, Webb told Hassan Ali he was interested in visiting Qadian because Ghulam Ahmad had done him "a great favor" by introducing him to Islam. But they ultimately decided against the visit, not wanting to jeopardize their funding.⁴³

⁴⁰ Alexander Russell Webb and Brent D. Singleton, *Yankee Muslim* (Maryland: Borgo Press/Wildside Press, 2007), 277.

⁴¹ Bowen, *History of Conversion*, 1:106.

⁴² Webb and Singleton, *Yankee Muslim*, 280.

⁴³ Abd-Allah, *A Muslim in Victorian America*, 124.

Biographers often see this as evidence that Webb's connection to Ahmadiyyat was fleeting and unsubstantial. Letters sent from Webb to India suggest otherwise. While he was probably not a formal follower of Ghulam Ahmad, he deeply respected the Indian messiah and maintained correspondence with him and other Ahmadiyya leaders for at least two decades. In a 1902 letter from Webb to Sadiq, he wrote:

I miss my dear brother Hassan Ali very much. He tried to do good according to his understanding but like me, he also made a mistake. I am pleased to hear that he had the audience of Hazrat Mirza [Ghulam Ahmad] Sahib before he passed away ... I regret why he and I did not go to Qadian at that time.⁴⁴

Four years later, Webb wrote to Ghulam Ahmad:

Alas! I came to India but did not visit you, although it was through you I found the right guidance. In not meeting you I tried to please some people so that they would give donations. They did not keep their promises and no donations were made. Now I regret greatly that I deprived myself of meeting a man of God for such people.⁴⁵

Webb also helped the Ahmadiyya scholar Maulvi Muhammad Ali (b. 1874), a prominent Lahori leader, translate at least one of Ghulam Ahmad's lectures into an English book. Years later when Nadirah Florence Ives Osman, a white American living in Turkey, read this publication in the 1930s and saw Ali's acknowledgement of Webb's assistance, Osman realized there was a small community of Muslims in America. She later became a prominent organizer, uniting New York's multi-ethnic Muslims, founding the New York Islamic Center and

⁴⁴ "100 Years Ago... – Alexander Russell Webb's love for Ahmadiyyat and news from Ceylon, Malabar, India and UK," *Al Hakam*, June 12, 2020, <https://www.alhakam.org/100-years-ago-alexander-russell-webbs-love-for-ahmadiyyat-and-news-from-ceylon-malabar-india-and-uk/>. (This article is a translation of *Al Hakam*'s original June 14, 1920 report on Webb's letter.)

⁴⁵ Webb and Singleton, *Yankee Muslim*, 23-25.

Muslim-American Citizens Society, and writing for the Lahori publication *The Islamic Review*. Osman later joined the Lahori Ahmadiyya movement.⁴⁶

Upon Ghulam Ahmad's death, Webb sent letters to the leader's successor, writing that he had "accomplished a great undertaking and conveyed the light of truth to hundreds of hearts, which it could not have reached otherwise ... I have been deeply affected by the fearless earnestness with which he continued to spread the truth in the pursuance of his purpose. I am sure that he will enjoy the companionship of the saints and prophets in heaven."⁴⁷

For Webb, too, had undertaken a mission of spreading the message of Islam in the U.S. despite any and all obstacles. Webb founded the country's first Islamic periodicals, *The Moslem World* and *The Voice of Islam*, as well as the U.S.'s first known Islamic institution, the American Moslem Brotherhood.⁴⁸ He published several short books, coordinated a network of Islamic study circles that crossed the Atlantic, and lectured on the faith nationally and internationally, in one month lecturing in five different states. His aim was to serve as America's Muslim spokesman. Indeed, Webb was effectively America's first Muslim missionary, preceding even Sadiq. Scholar Patrick Bowen's volume on white American conversion to Islam pre-1975 ties a slew of other turn-of-the-century figures to Webb's movement and affiliated study circles. Webb's Islamic propaganda project from 1893 to 1896 also likely influenced "subsequent efforts

⁴⁶ Bowen, *History of Conversion*, 1:262.

⁴⁷ Muhammad Zafrullah Khan, *Ahmadiyyat: The Renaissance of Islam*, (Tabshir Publications, 1978): 175-176. <https://www.alislam.org/library/books/AhmadiyyatRenaissanceofIslam.pdf>.

⁴⁸ This organization was also called American Islamic Propaganda, among a few other names over its lifetime.

to establish Islam in America by inspiring early Muslim immigrants in New York to organize themselves and make their faith known."⁴⁹

Among Webb's goals was producing a high-quality English-language translation of the Quran written by a Muslim, rather than an Orientalist scholar or Christian missionary, which could then be made accessible to all learned Americans. Two months before Webb's death, the Lahori scholar Mualvi Muhammad Ali completed this historic translation, to be published a year later in 1907. This translation marked a watershed moment in Islam in the West, helping legitimize the very notion of translating Quran into English for Muslims.⁵⁰ Ali's translation was crucial in helping spread Islam to African Americans, and it was the version later adopted by the Nation of Islam. Later translators including Yusuf Ali and Marmaduke Pickthall heavily relied on Ali's translation, which "formed the basis for many later works, even if the majority of both Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims avoid directly acknowledging or using an Ahmadi translation."⁵¹

Webb also put a number of other white American intellectuals in contact with Ghulam Ahmad, sometimes sending copies of the Ahmadiyya magazine *The Review of Religions* to them. One of these individuals was a man from New York City named F.L. Andersen. In 1901, Andersen became the first known Ahmadiyya Muslim in America. He joined the movement

⁴⁹ Abd-Allah, *A Muslim in Victorian America*, 272.

⁵⁰ As most Muslims hold that the Quran comprises the revealed word of God, many also hold that translations from the original Arabic are mere interpretations. Until the 1940s, most Muslim scholars were skeptical of the enterprise of translating the Quran into English. For more, see Stefan Wild, "Muslim Translators and Translations of the Qur'an into English," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 17, no. 3 (November 2015): 158-182.

⁵¹ Khaleel Mohammed, "Assessing English Translations of the Qur'an," *Middle East Quarterly*, 12, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 58-71, <https://www.meforum.org/717/assessing-english-translations-of-the-quran>.

after corresponding with Ghulam Ahmad, having been connected by Webb. He also began corresponding with Sadiq the same year, two decades before Sadiq's mission began on U.S. soil. Ghulam Ahmad himself wrote about Andersen in one of his manuscripts: "Only recently a respectable English gentleman...in the United States of America, whose earlier name was F.L. Anderson, but who has been named Hasan after he became a Muslim, wrote to me by his own hand to ask that his name be entered into my Jama'at ... He reads my books that have been translated into English. He can read the Holy Quran in Arabic and can also write in Arabic."⁵² Andersen himself wrote a letter to Qadian in 1905 in which he commented on a recent *Review of Religions* article and requested a certificate of his acceptance into the movement.

Ghulam Ahmad went on to mention another white convert who appears to have come to the movement through Webb. Anthony George Baker "read about me in the *Review of Religions*, and wrote that he totally agrees with the views of this Imam, who has presented Islam to the world in exactly the same form as the Holy Prophet [peace be upon him] had done," Ghulam Ahmad wrote.⁵³ A prominent medical doctor and ordained Presbyterian minister who later became an Episcopalian priest, Baker corresponded with Webb and read his journal *The Moslem World* in 1893.⁵⁴ He began reading *The Review of Religions* and, by 1904, was corresponding with Sadiq and identified as a practicing Muslim. Baker also began giving public speeches about his new faith. He sent some of these lectures to Sadiq, including one entitled "Muhammad, the

⁵² Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, *Barahin-e-Ahmadiyya*, vol. 5 (Surrey, United Kingdom: Islam International Publications Ltd, 2018), 131, <https://www.alislam.org/library/books/Barahin-e-Ahmadiyya-Part-5.pdf>.

⁵³ Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, *Barahin-e-Ahmadiyya*, vol. 5, 132.

⁵⁴ Yahya Luqman, "Untold Story: The First Ahmadi Muslim Convert in Philadelphia," *The Review of Religions*, July 26, 2019, <https://www.reviewofreligions.org/17280/the-first-ahmadi-muslim-convert-in-philadelphia>.

founder of an Empire, and Religion which is still spreading,” and had them published in *The Review of Religions*. By 1913, he was Philadelphia’s most prominent lecturer on Islam.⁵⁵

Though Webb has become a key figure in studies of Victorian Islam, the Ahmadiyya movement comprises a footnote in public memory of Webb’s life. Looking at the networks into which he was plugged offers a globalized, cosmopolitan image of Islamic missionizing and scholarship in which the Ahmadiyya movement was a major player. Webb served as a critical junction point, actively perpetuating these networks and its Ahmadiyya nodes. Looking into the expansive library of Ahmadiyya literature and examining the networks of correspondence and publications surrounding early white Americans’ explorations of Islam reveals a clear thread between the Dowie *mubahala*, Webb’s propaganda efforts among white intellectuals, America’s alternative spiritual revolution, and Sadiq’s missionary work.

Sadiq and His Successors

By the time Sadiq, an erudite scholar and close companion of Ghulam Ahmad, arrived in the U.S. on Feb. 15, 1920, he had already been corresponding with and engaging with Americans including Webb, Andersen and Baker for years. The community’s caliph directed him to establish an official mission in America after a stint of missionary work in England, where similar inroads were being made by Ahmadiyya scholar-preachers.

Sadiq’s arrival brought a new wave of press coverage, interactions with Christian missionaries and religious leaders, and engagements with Muslim and non-Muslim

⁵⁵ Patrick D. Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States, Volume 1: White American Muslims before 1975* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 170–72, 177.

communities he encountered across the country. Sadiq criss-crossed the country, visiting 14 states — Pennsylvania, New York, Michigan, Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Kentucky, West Virginia, Maryland and Massachusetts — and delivering lectures, hosting public debates, meeting local Muslims who frequently issued invitations to host him, and speaking to journalists in the area.

From the very first day Sadiq arrived in Philadelphia aboard the S.S. Haverford, and was promptly detained for almost seven weeks over concerns that he was a polygamist, he became a media sensation. That was partly due to his appearance: Sadiq's dark complexion, large beard, and green-and-golden turban instantly set him apart. A slew of area newspapers detailed his goals: The *Pittsburgh Daily Post* described him as a "Mahomet Missioner," an "American missionary of the Prophet Mohammed" and "Antithesis of Billy Sunday," seeking to convert Americans to "Ahmadism...an advanced form of Mohammedanism."⁵⁶

One remarkable news feature was published in Utah's *The Ogden Standard-Examiner* of June 25, 1922. It contains a portrait of Sadiq and his journal, *The Moslem Sunrise*, with a sensational tabloid-style headline: "Trying to Make Christian America Mohammedan: Amazing Details of the Movement Now Under Way to Win New Converts to the Faith of Mohammed and Fill Our Cities with Mosques From Whose Towers the Muezzins May Call Millions to Worship Allah As the Koran Teaches."⁵⁷ Beneath the headline, a muezzin is painted performing the call

⁵⁶ Ghulam Misbah, "Retracing Hazrat Mufti Muhammad Sadiq's travels in America," *Al Hakam*, April 7, 2020. <https://www.alhakam.org/retracing-hazrat-mufti-muhammad-sadiqs-travels-in-america>

⁵⁷ "Trying to Make Christian American Mohammadan," *The Ogden Standard-Examiner*, June 25, 1922, Sunday Feature Section, page 8. Image 36 in *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, retrieved digitally via the Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85058393/1922-06-25/ed-1/seq-36>.

to pray from atop an imagined minaret in the center of New York City. The article contains a lengthy excerpt of Sadiq's writings in which he imagines how U.S. immigration officials would deny even Jesus were he to seek entry to the country.

Sadiq, like Ghulam Ahmad, recognized the press as an important mechanism for exposing more Americans to Islam and changing attitudes toward a faith seen as foreign and backward. As soon as he moved to New York City, Sadiq began an effort to send Ahmadiyya propaganda to every newspaper in the country, some of which was published. He sent thousands of letters, missionary epistles and magazines to libraries, Masonic lodges and other institutions around the U.S. In 1921, when he moved to Detroit, he founded and edited *The Moslem Sunrise*, which today remains the longest-running U.S. Muslim publication. The journal featured Quranic passages and hadith, writings of Ghulam Ahmad, theological treatises and critiques of contemporary religion, articles on global current affairs, and reports of Sadiq and his followers' missionary endeavors. Sadiq also published a slew of letters to the editor about Islam within a number of American publications. Over his three-year mission in the U.S., tens of thousands of letters were received and sent, and well over a hundred lectures were delivered.

Sadiq had no compunctions about using Western media to critique his Christians audiences' beliefs, from Islam's inferiority to Jesus' divinity. The charismatic speaker and writer frequently engaged in frank interreligious dialogue that boldly dissected American Christians' inconsistencies and hypocrisies, and dared them to recognize the Islam's virtues. In playing on images of the mystical Orient, challenging white Christian supremacy, and using rational arguments to preach and debate, Sadiq and his contemporaries "addressed non-Muslims

worldwide as a colonized people who had been misled about the Prophet Muhammad, and they promoted Islam as an emancipative, politically dissident religion with a transnational moral geography that challenged the purpose and foundation of the nation-state."⁵⁸

One Thursday evening in 1921, in a two-hour lecture on Islam before a crowd of 1,200 listeners in the United Automobile Workers Union Hall, Sadiq issued a challenge to Detroit's clergy. "Friday is coming, and we have no mosque in the city," he said, after describing an incident wherein the Prophet Muhammad offered use of his mosque to a group of Christians.⁵⁹ "Are the Christian ministers of Detroit as broadminded as Mohammed?" As a follow-up article he submitted to the *Detroit Free Press* explained, he received "an all-around refusal, excepting one Unitarian club."⁶⁰ To a pastor who told Sadiq that he was in "conflict" with Christianity and churches should therefore not be opened to him, Sadiq responded via the press:

"Well, I love Jesus ... I am not an enemy of Christ. But suppose I am. Then don't you preach, 'Love your enemies?' Yes, you do. But you do not practice what you teach. You could not and you do not. I knew this well. But I wanted to get it out of your mouths, and I have got it."

And his methods were largely effective. Sadiq brought about seven hundred new Ahmadis into the movement while in the U.S., from Chinese, Turkish and Bosnian immigrants to black and white Americans. S.W. Sobolewski, who had heard Sadiq's lectures in New York, took the name Fatima Mustafa and began studying Ahmadiyya literature and Arabic; Robert

⁵⁸ Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country*, 92.

⁵⁹ "Moslem Hurls Tolerance Defy at Christian Pulpits: Challenges Pastors to Open Churches as Prophet in Mecca did." *Detroit Free Press* (1858-1922), February 8, 1921. Retrieved digitally via ProQuest.

⁶⁰ Mufti Sadiq, "Muhammadan Replies to His Local Critics," *Detroit Free Press* (1858-1922), March 1, 1921. Retrieved digitally via ProQuest.

Bednell of Greenwich, Connecticut, became Abdullah; Elizabeth Barton became Zeineb; Lewis Holt became Fateh Din; and on and on went the lists, printed in *The Moslem Sunrise*.

A study of the magazine reveals the prevalence of women's participation and leadership within the early movement. Female Ahmadis have been agents rather than subjects, fundraising for mosques, publishing poetry and essays in Ahmadiyya journals, hosting sewing circles and prayer groups, lecturing and preaching in public, engaging in civic action and social service. Several women's photos have been included in *The Moslem Sunrise*. Among these converts was a white Pennsylvania war nurse named Edith Hoffman, whom Sadiq married. But another name appears even more frequently: Siddiqatun Nisa Rahatullah, formerly Ella May Garber (b. circa 1886). A white woman from Indiana, Rahatullah had been studying Islam about a decade prior to meeting Sadiq. Rahatullah had originally become Muslim in 1911 while studying Sufi poetry, and likely become a student of the Sufi sheikh Inayat Khan's movement in California.⁶¹ She had also been a disciple of the charismatic Ottoman Palestinian scholar Sayyid Wajih al-Kilani, who developed relationships with Ahmadiyya Muslims in Washington, D.C. and likely in Philadelphia before dying in 1916.⁶² After she encountered Sadiq and joined the movement, Rahatullah quickly became his right-hand woman, delivering several lectures at Ahmadiyya meetings as well as for the broader public. The Detroit press dubbed her the "first female missionary" of Islam, and her passion for *tabligh*, or propogation, was lauded in Ahmadiyya literature.⁶³ In New York, she lectured on Islam and gained at least two converts from her own

⁶¹ Bowen, *History of Conversion*, 1:221.

⁶² William G. Clarence-Smith, "An Ottoman Notable in America in 1915-1916: Sayyid Wajih al-Kilani of Nazareth," in *American and Muslims Worlds Before 1900* (India: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 144.

⁶³ "100 Years Ago... – First female missionary of Islam in America," Al Hakam, 2021.

missionary work.⁶⁴ Sadiq often published her verses within *The Moslem Sunrise*, and she frequently collaborated with Sadiq in translating poems of Ghulam Ahmad into English for publication. (In later years, Rahatullah likely became a follower of Satti Majid (b. 1883), a prominent Sudanese Sunni missionary who formed what may have been the first national Sunni Muslim organization; after Majid left the U.S., he attempted to obtain a fatwa from Egyptian religious authorities against the U.S. Ahmadiyya missionaries he had encountered.⁶⁵)

Amid the Great Migration, Sadiq quickly found that black Americans were the population most receptive to his proselytization. Sadiq and his successors' progress, Grewal writes, was "arguably due to their ability to translate the egalitarian ethos of Islam to the terms of Black Religion" through integrating "the recovery of origins and Islamic roots...the revalorization of African and Indian roots, and challenges to white supremacy" into his mission. "For the Ahmadis, Islam was not a religion for blacks so much as a religion that allowed blacks to inherit a broader, alternative history, one more universal and less constraining the bitter legacy of American slavery," she writes.⁶⁶

Sadiq pioneered the movement's "groundbreaking work" as the first attempt to "break down the racial and ethnic barriers between different communities of Muslims in America to develop a multi-racial version of Islam in the United States."⁶⁷ The movement constituted the sole "notable exception to the unofficial maxim that immigrant Muslims refrain from giving

⁶⁴ Muhammad Sadiq, "Brief Report of Work in America," *The Moslem Sunrise* 1, no. 2 (October 1921): 36-38, https://muslimsunrise.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/1921_issue_2.pdf.

⁶⁵ Bowen, "Satti Majid," 197.

⁶⁶ Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country*, 92-93.

⁶⁷ Turner, *Islam in the African American Experience*, 108.

Dawah (inviting to submission to Allah) to African Americans,” an attitude that reigned among most immigrants until the 1970s.⁶⁸ Before Sadiq returned to India at the caliph’s request, he had “ordained” at least a dozen “sheikhs” who studied Islam and Ahmadiyya doctrine under him. Through a “network of approximately sixteen missions in cities stretching from the Mississippi to the Atlantic,” their preaching produced a new wave of mostly black converts, including more than 600 people following Ahmadiyya sheikhs in Pittsburgh and Cleveland alone.⁶⁹

One of these sheikhs was a former Christian minister who began heading up the Detroit Ahmadiyya branch.⁷⁰ Rev. BD Sutton, who became the enthusiastic Ahmadiyya preacher Sheikh Abdus Salam, had been one of at least 40 pan-Africanist Garveyites that joined the movement following Sadiq’s five lectures to the Universal Negro Improvement Association in Detroit. While Sadiq’s hopes that the UNIA would declare Islam its official religion never came to fruition, this collaboration with the UNIA brought more converts and helped establish Islam’s ties to Pan-African, black nationalist and anti-imperialist activist and intellectual activity. Sadiq had possibly been connected to the UNIA by one of Marcus Garvey’s mentors, the traveling Sudanese-Egyptian journalist-activist-actor Duse Mohamed Ali (b. 1866). Ali’s intellectual and literary contributions as the founder of a pioneering anti-colonialist political

⁶⁸ Khalid Fattah Griggs, “Islamic Party in North America: A Quiet Storm of Political Activism,” in *Muslim Minorities in the West*, eds. Yvonne Haddad and Jane Smith (United Kingdom: AltaMira Press, 2002), 79.

⁶⁹ Robert Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 38. These sheikhs included Ahmad Din, Ashiq Ahmad, Wali Akram, Nasir Ahmad and Saeed Akmal of Pittsburgh, Ahmad Omar of Braddock, Abdullah Malik of Columbus, Ahmad Rasool of Dayton, and Shareef Ali of Cincinnati. For more, see a British Ahmadiyya researcher’s study of these figures: Talha Sami, “The untold story of Black Muslims: The Mufti and the Sheikhs,” *Al Hakam*, October 16, 2020, <https://www.alhakam.org/the-untold-story-of-black-muslims-the-mufti-and-the-sheikhs>.

⁷⁰ Muhammad Sadiq, “Brief Report of the Work in America,” *The Moslem Sunrise* 2, no. 1, (January 1923): 166-167, https://muslimsunrise.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/1923_iss_1.pdf.

journal and head of the UNIA's African Affairs division helped forward the connection between Pan-Africanist and Islamic thought. In 1921, Duse Muhammad Ali went to Detroit to deliver a few lectures and help form a Muslim society to establish a local center for weekly congregational prayer. He had been invited by some Indian Muslims he had met in New York — likely Sadiq and the Ahmadis. Ali had previously been closely involved in the major Lahori Ahmadiyya mission in the U.K., helping missionary Khwaja Kamaluddin organize prayers and unite local Muslims. Decades later, in the 1970s, Ahmadiyya intellectual Agadem Lumumba Diara who published *Islam and Pan-Africanism*, which refuted critics of Islam as an Arab religion, and ran the only successful Black Muslim Pan-African publishing house at the time.⁷¹

Within thirteen years of Sadiq's arrival, the Qadian-based movement claimed 20,000 American followers. Sadiq recognized the historic nature of his work and ruminated over the legacy he had built. He reflected in the first issue of *The Moslem Sunrise* on the challenges that came with paving the way, particularly in choosing a headquarters — which he strategically moved from New York City to Detroit to Chicago — and in optimizing a strategy for preaching to America's Christians:

It being the very first attempt to approach the Americans with the mission of Islam, I had to pass through all the difficulties that always confront a beginner of a work. I had no precedent before me to guide me ... I do hope, in the grace of Allah, that in clearing the way for the future missionaries of Islam I have done some pioneer work and sown the seed of truth throughout the land which will grow up in time and show in big, tall, strong trees to feed and shelter thousands, and send out healthy vibration to millions.⁷²

⁷¹ Patrick D. Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States*, vol. 2 *The African American Islamic renaissance: 1920-1975* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017), 563.

⁷² Muhammad Sadiq, "One Year's Moslem Missionary Work in America," *The Moslem Sunrise* 1, no. 2 (October 1921): 12, https://muslimsunrise.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/1921_issue_2.pdf.

Among the most contested questions in the history of American Islam is the site of the nation's first mosque. Two contenders for this title, both constructed in the early 1920s, were closely tied to Sadiq and the Ahmadiyya movement.

In the Detroit area, a growing immigrant Muslim community had begun to emerge as the auto manufacturing industry was exploding and the Ottoman Empire was falling. Among those immigrants were two Arab brothers, Mohammed and Hussein Karoub, a wealthy real estate developer and a Damascus-trained Islamic scholar, respectively. Eager to make Detroit the center of America's Muslim community, the brothers began constructing the Highland Park Mosque in 1920, just a few blocks from Ford's Model T plant. When the mosque opened in 1921 with Eid al-Fitr prayers, the festivities were presided over by three imams from different Islamic traditions: Hussein Karoub, Khalil Bazzi, and Sadiq, who had delivered several lectures in the area. Of the three imams — a Sunni, a Twelver Shi'i, and an Ahmadi, respectively — it was the Ahmadi who was recognized as holding the highest rank,⁷³ and who delivered the sermon and led both the Eid prayers and a parade along Victor Avenue that day. Amid sectarian divisions and financial issues, as well as the drop in Muslim immigration with the passage of the Emergency Quota Act, the mosque soon closed.

Sadiq's involvement in this historic project, however short lived, speaks to the movement's central but contested role within early U.S. Muslim institution-building, as the ummah began attempting to gather resources, formally organize, and consolidate into a singular community rather than small ethnic pockets scattered around the country. This history

⁷³ "Moslems Celebrate Feast of Id-Ul-Fitr," *The Moslem Sunrise* 1, no. 2 (October 1921): 22, https://muslimsunrise.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/1921_issue_2.pdf.

also offers an early example of early American intra-Muslim unity, the likes of which are rare today. While Sadiq's Ahmadiyya faith became the subject of some criticism in Detroit's Arabic-language press at the time, with some arguing that he was a follower of a new religion and accusing him of collecting donations for his own mosque, some influential Sunni Arab immigrants in the area rose to his defense, describing him as a "profound scholar of Islam" who "defends Islam with such strength of knowledge and bravery that he has made the popularity of Muslims among the Americans like a fragrance."⁷⁴ After Sadiq left to go to Chicago, where plans for an Ahmadiyya mosque and headquarters were taking shape, Siddiqatun Nisa Rahatullah continued the movement's mission in Highland Park.

Sadiq had advised readers of *The Moslem Sunrise* to "build a Mosque in every town to worship one God, however small and simple it be," saying it was necessary to have a space for Muslims to meet, pray and study their faith together.⁷⁵ The journal recorded his followers' efforts to follow this guidance, from one converts' progress in fundraising for a mosque in New Orleans to another's effort to secure a location in Chicago. Those plans came to fruition in 1921, when Sadiq purchased a two-story building at Wabash Ave. in Chicago. The Al Sadiq Mosque was funded by donations from Qadian and from black American converts. The mosque is the longest-running mosque in the U.S., though in the 90s the structure was replaced by a purpose-built mosque that remains a center of Ahmadiyya worship, missionizing and religious activity today.

⁷⁴ Ghulam Misbah, "Hazrat Mufti Muhammad Sadiq and the Arab Muslim community of America," *Al Hakam*, August 20, 2021.

<https://www.alhakam.org/hazrat-mufti-muhammad-sadiq-and-the-arab-muslim-community-of-america>.

⁷⁵ Muhammad Sadiq, "My Advice to the Muhammadans in America," *The Moslem Sunrise* 1, no. 2 (October 1921): 29, https://muslimsunrise.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/1921_issue_2.pdf.

Two other historic mosques contending for the role of America's first mosque include the Mother Mosque of America, established in 1938 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa and believed to be the first purpose-built mosque in the country (the Highland Park Mosque and Al-Sadiq Mosque were purchased and repurposed as houses of worship); and First Masjid in America, which homesteading Arab immigrants erected in 1929 in the remote prairies of Ross, North Dakota and which is thought to be oldest mosque that is still standing (whereas the Highland Park Mosque dissolved and the Al-Sadiq Mosque was rebuilt). Through such reasoning, both mosques Sadiq led are frequently ignored in favor of the Iowa and North Dakota mosques. It is interesting to note, though, that in 1923 Sadiq himself visited Muslim immigrants working in Ross and Stanley, North Dakota. There, he delivered a public lecture at the invitation of some local Muslims. In his brief report on the lecture for *The Moslem Sunrise*, he thanked "Mr. S.M. George, Hessen Hussain Jaha, B.A. Farhat, Omar Brothers and others" for making the visit possible.⁷⁶ While the historic Ross mosque was not constructed until about six years after Sadiq's visit, Sadiq interacted with the locals who went on to build the mosque, including the Omar family which helped lead the endeavor.

Black Leadership and Institution-Building

After Sadiq's three-year mission in the U.S. came to a close and he returned to India, American Ahmadis' involvement in institution-building continued under his successors. An ongoing supply of foreign missionaries continued to organize public lectures and study groups, teaching about Islam and Arabic; men and women who passed these courses were granted the

⁷⁶ Muhammad Sadiq, "Brief Report of the Work in America," *The Moslem Sunrise* 2, no. 1 (January 1923): 166. https://muslimsunrise.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/1923_iss_1.pdf

title of sheikh and themselves became licensed to teach Islam around the country.⁷⁷ The Al Sadiq Mosque continued to serve as the Qadiani Ahmadiyya national headquarters until the 1950 purchase of the American Fazl Mosque in Washington, D.C.. The Fazl Mosque opened seven years before the Sunni-led Islamic Center of Washington and is also among the country's earliest mosques. Across the country, the movement developed some of the first mosques in various regions and states. The Qadiani journal *The Moslem Sunrise* and its Lahori counterpart *The Islamic Review* continued publication, with the latter becoming one of the 20th century's most prominent Western journals of Islamic thought and its "first successful English-language Sunni publication in the US."⁷⁸ (Though it was founded by a Lahori Ahmadiyya leader in the U.K., the journal focused on presenting a universal vision of Islam and was thus coded as orthodox.⁷⁹) The Ahmadiyya movement, scholars say, "provided a majority of the literature available to all African American Muslim communities for many decades, especially Qur'ans and commentary on the Qur'an."⁸⁰ Islamic Party of North America leader Daud Salahuddin once noted the continued centrality of Ahmadiyya literature and missionary work in the 1940s and 1950s, saying the movement was then "the only process" for black conversion:

If you were not an Ahmadiyya, you were nothing. There was not a Sunni presence to be found in our community. If you were fortunate enough to be able to find a Muslim prayer book, you had better believe that it was produced by the Ahmadiyyas ... English Qur'ans were few and far between ... mostly found in the occult or spiritual shops.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Aminah Beverly McCloud, *African American Islam* (London: Routledge, 1995), 19.

⁷⁸ Bowen, *History of Conversion*, 1:252.

⁷⁹ Amanda Lanzillo, "The life and times of a British journal of Islam," *Himal Southasian*, March 18, 2019, <https://www.himalmag.com/islamic-review-ahmadiyya-amanda-lanzillo-2019/>.

⁸⁰ McCloud, *African American Islam*, 19.

⁸¹ Griggs, "Islamic Party in North America: A Quiet Storm of Political Activism," 79.

Several of the sheikhs produced by the U.S. Ahmadiyya mission also went on to develop some of the most influential institutions in 20th century American Islam. Though some ultimately rejected Ahmadiyya hierarchy or elements of its theology, their organizations and teachings continued to be informed by what they had learned from Ahmadiyya missionaries.⁸² Sheikh Ahmad Din was the first Ahmadiyya convert whom Sadiq granted the title of sheikh. A prominent black leader, he had reportedly converted around 100 people in the first six months of his mission in St. Louis, Missouri. One of these was a black seminary drop-out named Walter Gregg (b. 1904), who in 1923 accepted Islam and took on the name Wali Akram. Akram soon moved to Cleveland, where in 1930 he established an Ahmadiyya mosque along with Ahmadiyya missionary Abul Fazl. He eventually left the community and founded his own mosque, dubbed the First Cleveland Mosque and which mostly served black Muslims. He eventually split from the movement, but continued to believe in Ghulam Ahmad's role as messiah and used Ahmadiyya materials as he taught generations of midwestern Muslims.⁸³

Like many black Muslim leaders in this era, Akram was fixated on shepherding a religious and economic revival among African Americans. He joined forces with a few black Muslim leaders on the East Coast, particularly Professor Muhammad Ezzeldeen (b. 1886), a Moorish Science Temple leader who had become Sunni and formed the Addeynu Allehe-Universal Arabic Association, and Sheikh Dawud Faisal (b. 1891), the Sunni founder of Brooklyn's famous State Street Masjid. Together, they formed an umbrella organization, called the Uniting Islamic Societies of America, in 1943. The project was an effort to unite black Sunni

⁸² GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America*, 213 and 247.

⁸³ Edward E. Curtis. *Encyclopedia of Muslim-American History*. (New York: Facts on File, 2010), 14.

Muslims around a common agenda of spiritual and economic self-sufficiency, strengthening them against the growing influence of and reliance upon immigrant Muslims.

Another Ahmadiyya-trained sheikh, Nasir Ahmad, was also involved in organizing the Uniting Islamic Societies of America initiative. Formerly known as Walter Smith Bey, Nasir Ahmad went on to form one of the first and largest black Sunni mosques in the country. He originally joined the Ahmadis through Ahmadiyya missionary Muhammad Yusuf Khan (who was later excommunicated by Ahmadiyya leaders over issues of fraud) in the early 1930s. He became an active preacher and led the Ahmadis of the Ohio River Valley area, where they soon claimed 3,000 converts. Years later, Nasir Ahmad joined the Lahori faction.⁸⁴ Nasir Ahmad became a central character in efforts to unite the diverse Muslim American coalitions and communities. He worked with Ezzeldeen, the prominent Moorish Science Temple leader-turned-Sunni leader, in creating the Black Sunni group Addeynu Allahe Universal Arabic Association in New Jersey. He also helped organize the Uniting Islamic Societies of America, whose broad membership included Akram's Cleveland community, Muhammad Yusuf Khan's new splinter group known as the Universal Muslim League of the Ahmadia Muslim Missionary, and other prominent multiethnic Sunni groups.

"Despite the fact that these groups generally identified themselves as Sunni Muslim, almost all of them had been influenced to a significant degree by two sectarian Islamic movements, the Moorish Science Temple and Ahmadiyah," historian Patrick Bowen notes,

⁸⁴ Patrick D. Bowen. "That We May Be Known Throughout All the Moslem World": Pittsburgh's African American Muslims, 1925–45." *Pennsylvania Legacies* 18, no. 1 (2018): 20–25. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5215/pennlega.18.1.0020>.

adding that these leaders carried into black American Sunnism and the Uniting Islamic Societies of America project the Ahmadiyya and Moorish beliefs that the original faith of Africans was Islam and that Christianity was harmful to people of color.⁸⁵ In 1943, Sheikh Nasir Ahmad and Sheikh Wali Akram collaborated to hold the First All Moslem and Arab Convention in Philadelphia, a watershed movement in U.S. Islam. Both men were black Muslim leaders who had joined the Qadiani Ahmadiyya movement and received religious credentials, but ultimately left (largely over discontentment with discredited missionary Muhammad Yusuf Khan's spiritual and financial exploitation of members), but continued to hold onto the more universalist and less discrete Lahori theology as they lead broader "Sunni" movements.

During this watershed conference, Akram was elected president of the Uniting Islamic Societies of America. Akram presented a draft constitution for the group and introduced what he called a "Muslim Ten Year Plan" for black Muslim self-sufficiency and unity. Akram legally incorporated this non-profit as the 'The Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam, & Moslem Ten Year Plan, Inc.,' a fact that rarely makes it to narratives about Akram's work.⁸⁶ Ultimately, the group fell apart due to competing visions about what Islam in American should look like. Regardless of his Ahmadiyya origins and his continued belief in some of the movement's unique tenets, Akram is recalled today as an "orthodox" Muslim leader of the early American *ummah*, which reminds us of how porous and arbitrary such categories are.

⁸⁵ "Unnamed Speaker at the Uniting Islamic Society of America (1943)." Oxford Islamic Studies Online, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/doc/ps-islam-0297>.

⁸⁶ Bowen, *History of Conversion*, 1:396.

Among these sheikhs' most important converts to Ahmadiyyat was black jazz trumpeter Talib Dawud. In 1947, Dawud and his wife, jazz singer Dakota Staton, became part of a groundswell of Ahmadiyya jazz musicians. These local bebop and jazz musicians, especially in East Coast urban cores from New York to Philadelphia, worked as "both transporters and innovators of twentieth century religious and cultural ideas," transmitting and cultivating Ahmadiyya ideas and communities as they were increasingly shaped by pan-African, pan-Asian, anti-colonial and religious reformist networks.⁸⁷ "Ahmadiyya Muslim missionaries were exemplars of transnationalism," Richard Brent Turner notes, and "their mission to blacks transformed the meaning of conversion among African American jazz musicians" from Etta James to Dakota Stanton.⁸⁸ These musicians created a distinctive and highly visible black Islamic urban culture that even included a unique bebop-Arabic patois.⁸⁹

Dawud became an active informal missionary for the movement, bringing in converts including jazz musicians Yusuf Lateef (a Grammy winner who remained dedicated to Ahmadiyyat until his 2013 death), Art Blakey (a Grammy winner who used his apartment as an Ahmadiyya-affiliated mission in New York), Yusuf Muzaffaruddin Hamid (who later founded the Islamic Party of North America, a major national black Sunni movement), and Daud Salahuddin (who later became head of the Islamic Party of North America's Chicago unit). In the late 50s, Dawud co-founded the Islamic and African Institute of Philadelphia as well as the Muslim Brotherhood USA, an Ahmadiyya affiliate in Detroit. By 1961, Dawud had 125 members

⁸⁷ Fanusie, "Ahmadi, Beboppers, Veterans, and Migrants," 50.

⁸⁸ Richard Brent Turner, *Soundtrack to a Movement: African American Islam, Jazz, and Black Internationalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2021), 4.

⁸⁹ Fanusie, "Ahmadi, Beboppers, Veterans, and Migrants," 52.

in his community. As spokesman for his organizations, he frequently published articles in Chicago newspapers criticizing the Nation of Islam and comparing it to “true” Islam, tussling with the Nation’s spokesman Malcolm X over the right to speak for Islam in the press.⁹⁰

That was far from Malcolm X’s first interaction with the movement, however. Years prior, it was an Ahmadiyya imam in Boston who first taught Malcolm X how to pray.

Ahmadis and the Nation

In 1943, Malcolm X’s best friend, an up-and-coming musician named Malcolm “Shorty” Jarvis, met an Ahmadiyya imam in Boston named Abdul Hameed. Hameed exuded a refined, urban cool as he walked through the city streets with his black fez and beard, a countercultural look to which Jarvis felt drawn. After Jarvis introduced himself to Hameed, the pair bonded over their shared interest in music and spent hours together at Hameed’s Roxbury home, with Hameed showing him books on Indian and Egyptian history, philosophy, religion, and music composition. “I felt like I was receiving a college education in one visit,” Jarvis recalled in his memoir. “I knew I had to introduce Malcolm [X] to this gentleman.”⁹¹ After much cajoling, Malcolm X agreed to meet Hameed, and the trio soon developed a strong bond. “Abdul took great interest in us and spent many hours teaching us,” Jarvis wrote. “He thought we deserved

⁹⁰ Bowen, *History of Conversion*, 2:491. One of Malcolm X’s prominent orthodox Muslim acquaintances included Federation of Islamic Association activist Aliya Hassen, who in 1959 “won Malcolm’s friendship after she went to the press to denounce Talib Dawud ... as a person who was not a legitimate Muslim authority” following his public criticisms of Islam. But studies of Aliya Hassen’s life (including Thomas Simsarian Dolan’s 2020 “Aliya Hassen: Transnational Networks, Ecumenism and American Islam”) shows that the Federation of Islamic Association itself published Ahmadiyya writers.

⁹¹ Malcolm Jarvis and Paul D. Nichols, *The Other Malcolm - “Shorty” Jarvis: His Memoir* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001), 55.

a better way of life than the one we were living.”⁹² Though Malcolm X had been initially reluctant to engage in discussions of religion, Abdul Hameed offered the young men their first introduction to Islam — an introduction made explicitly through the lens of the Ahmadiyya movement — at a moment when converting to Islam was increasingly seen as a “cool expression of African American religious internationalism and blackness.”⁹³

Just as the Ahmadiyya movement’s link to Webb’s conversion and Islamic missionary project has been under-examined, so has the community’s early influence on Malcolm X’s journey to Islam. This is both because these individuals never joined the movement, but also due to popular ideas about Ahmadiyya Islam as heretical.

When Malcolm X and Jarvis were arrested and detained in Boston’s Norfolk Prison Colony, Hameed began visiting them there in 1947. Hameed, whom Malcolm X identified in his autobiography only as a member of the local orthodox Muslim community, sent them a manual of Islamic prayers and taught them the Arabic pronunciation during his visits. Malcolm X noted that he had memorized these prayers phonetically and regretted having forgotten them when he was in Mecca for the hajj.⁹⁴ “Abdul Hameed played a very important role in our lives while we were in prison,” Jarvis recalled, hazarding a guessing that the reason Malcolm X’s autobiography made little mention of Hameed was that he felt Hameed’s “version of Islam bordered on heresy.”⁹⁵

⁹² Jarvis and Nichols, *The Other Malcolm*, 55.

⁹³ Turner, *Soundtrack to a Movement*, 67.

⁹⁴ Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), 335.

⁹⁵ Jarvis and Nichols, *The Other Malcolm*, 125.

Jarvis had encountered other Ahmadiyya jazz musicians previously in Boston, too. In 1946, as a trumpet student, he had met with Khalil Mahmoud, a jazz pianist and prolific Ahmadiyya preacher. Mahmoud held Ahmadiyya meetings at his family home in Cambridge, spread the movement's teachings in the city's South End, and engaged with the Sunni Arab immigrants residing in Quincy Point. Jarvis reportedly expressed interest in learning more about Islam, and coordinated a visit between him, Mahmoud and his friend Malcolm X. Shortly before their planned meeting, the pair was arrested.⁹⁶ Some scholars have suggested Malcolm X's subsequent identification as "Asiatic" and his insistence on Islamic universalism, even while following a black nationalist theology, may have emerged from such engagement with the Ahmadiyya movement. If so, the movement would then be closely linked to one of American Islam's most pivotal movements: Malcolm X and Imam Warith Deen Muhammad's later break from the original Nation of Islam. Indeed, there are close ties between the latter figure and the movement, as well.

While a substantive analysis of black Islamic theologies and their connections to the Ahmadiyya movement goes beyond the scope of this paper, Ahmadiyya notions of continuous prophecy, the spiritual manifestation of the messiah and mahdi, Jesus's natural death, Islamic universalism, and print jihad have all played a role in shaping the theologies and cosmologies of black American Muslim movements. But scholars have also drawn historical links from the Ahmadiyya movement's Qadiani and Lahori branches to the uniquely American black Muslim movements that emerged in the 20th century: the Moorish Science Temple, the Nation of Islam,

⁹⁶ Fanusie, "Ahmadi, Beboppers, Veterans, and Migrants," 53.

and the communities and sects that emerged from out of them (including the Sunni Muslims that followed W.D. Mohammed out of the Nation).

Virtually all Black Muslims, including those affiliated with the Moorish Science Temple and Nation of Islam, relied on copies of Lahori leader Maulana Muhammad Ali's translation of the Quran when it appeared in America. The Lahori mission to the U.S. did not officially begin until 1947, when its representative Bashir Ahmad Minto arrived in San Francisco and founded the Moslem Society of the U.S.A. Inc., and began a campaign of advertisements, letters, lectures and fundraising. A decade later, he was followed by a Lahori missionary named Muhammad Abdullah (b. 1905), who had been preaching in Fiji. But the Lahori movement's unofficial influence in the country began long before and had a much wider impact. Some scholars have posited that Wallace Fard Muhammad, the mysterious founder of the Nation of Islam who arrived in Detroit in 1930 and taught Elijah Muhammad (b. 1897) before disappearing about three years later, may have been Lahori or had exposure to Ahmadiyya theology.⁹⁷ Some of the connections between the Lahori movement and the Nation of Islam are plain to see. Early on, Fard reportedly called Elijah "Gulam." The Nation of Islam's description of Fard as "Mahdi of the Muslims and Messiah of the Christians" mirrors Ahmadiyya understandings of Ghulam Ahmad's role. Fard gave Elijah Muhammad a copy of Muhammad Ali's Quran translation, with an inscription added describing Ghulam Ahmad as "the greatest religious leader of the present

⁹⁷ See Karl Evanzz, *The Messenger* (United Kingdom: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011); Zafar. Ansari, "The Religious Doctrines of the Black Muslims in America," *Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs Journal* 3 no. 1 (1981), 199-201; and Michael Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas*, (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 277-287.

time.”⁹⁸ In interviews, Elijah Muhammad’s son and successor Imam Warith Deen Mohammed (b. 1933) has described reading the Ahmadiyya literature that filled his father’s private library. Indeed, the Nation of Islam’s website today sells books by Lahori leader Muhammad Ali.

Elijah Muhammad himself had an ongoing relationship with the Lahori movement through his longtime advisor Muhammad Abdullah, the Lahori missionary. Abdullah had maintained correspondence with Elijah Muhammad for years while was serving as a missionary in Fiji before he moved to the U.S., and later tutored Elijah’s son W.D. Mohammed. After Elijah Muhammad’s death, Abdullah helped W.D. Mohammed reform the Nation and integrate orthodox prayer and practice. W.D. Mohammed appointed him to serve as imam in the Nation’s Oakland mosque.

Rumors abounded, aided by W.D. Mohammed, that Abdullah had been Fard all along. Some scholars and members of the Nation have been skeptical of this claim, which Abdullah himself denied.⁹⁹ But historian Fatimah Fanusie makes a compelling case that this was true. In fact, she argues, not only did Fard and the Nation of Islam have links to the Ahmadiyya movement, Fard and the Nation were the direct result of an strategic effort by Lahori Ahmadis to plant the seeds of an indigenous Islam within the U.S. through carefully crafting a religious syncretism.¹⁰⁰ Her argument is understandably contentious within the communities involved: Not only does it locate the Nation’s religious authority outside of its own cosmology, but this

⁹⁸ Michael Muhammad Knight, *Blue-Eyed Devil: A Road Odyssey Through Islamic America* (Brooklyn, NY: Soft Skull Press, 2009), 92.

⁹⁹ Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience*, 165.

¹⁰⁰ Fatimah Fanusie, “Fard Muhammad in Historical Context: An Islamic Thread in the American Religious and Cultural Quilt” (PhD diss., Howard University, 2008). This study focuses solely on the Lahori faction, which broke completely from the majority Ahmadiyya sect.

link would further marginalize Ahmadis and associate them with heterodoxy, undermining their own claims of bringing the “true” Islam.

Fanusie’s dissertation makes the case that Abdullah, a Lahori reformist, entered the U.S. under the pseudonym Fard. Fard, she suggests, was likely a persona he created, preaching a theology he had crafted in an attempt to Islamicize and appeal to a black American underclass increasingly disenchanted with Christianity and drawn to esotericism. Abdullah played with religious syncretism (a tool used successfully both by other Asian religious missionaries in the U.S., such as Bahá’ís, as well as historically by medieval Sufi mystics preaching to non-Muslim masses) to cultivate an Islamic identity and critique of Christianity as white supremacist. Responding to Americans’ “thirst for esoteric knowledge and spiritual fulfillment,” Abdullah “attempted to provide a response to this quest through his own esoteric movement by utilizing the paraphernalia and culture of the esoteric and exotic cult in order to lead his followers ... to the wisdom of the Qur’an,” she writes.¹⁰¹

In 1959, nearly 30 years after Fard mysteriously disappeared and left his protege Elijah Muhammad behind to lead the new organization, Lahori Ahmadiyya leaders officially sent Abdullah to the U.S. to instruct Elijah Muhammad, his son W.D. Mohammed and the Nation’s leaders in Islam. Fanusie’s study saw this move as the final stage in a five-stage process of Ahmadiyya cultivation of Islam in America: (1) an early literary campaign from 1880-1902, (2) dissemination through their English journals from 1902-1920, (3) direct involvement with American religious society from 1920-1930, (4) the use of the persona of Fard Muhammad as a

¹⁰¹ Fanusie, “Fard Muhammad in Historical Context,” 252.

cultural mediator from 1930-1933, and finally (5) shepherding the Nation beyond its nominal identity as Muslims by tutoring W.D. Mohammed from 1959-1975.

Historians agree that the Nation was the main vehicle by which African Americans were exposed to Islam prior to 1975. Fanusie's conclusion, based on a deep study of the Lahori Ahmadiyya movement's evangelism and Fard's historical context, goes even further: "The Nation of Islam and the overwhelming Muslim presence among African-Americans prior to the 1965 Asian Immigration Act can be traced directly to Ahmadiyya missionary work."¹⁰² While the Qadiani Ahmadiyya movement (to which Sadiq and Rashid Ahmad American belonged) emphasized Ahmadiyyat's distinctive beliefs, the less visible Lahori branch emphasized its universal truth, working behind the scenes in an effort to introduce Islamic values to all populations by any name. (From a critical perspective, the Lahori sect's leaders were "eager to adapt their message to the convictions of fashions of the present hour and to exploit the ignorance of their audience by making any assertions that will favor their cause," as one American professor warned in 1929.¹⁰³)

The Nation of Islam and its breakaway groups may then, perhaps, also be counted among Ghulam Ahmad's spiritual and intellectual heirs. While scholars often position the Nation of Islam and Black Sunni movements (such as Imam W.D. Mohammed's community and the Islamic Party of North America) solely as challengers to the Ahmadiyya mission, they might also be seen as the fruit it bore.

¹⁰² Fanusie, "Fard Muhammad in Historical Context," 36.

¹⁰³ Addison, "The Ahmadiya Movement and its Western Propaganda," 32.

Rashid Ahmad American

The story of Rashid Ahmad (b. 1923), the first African American to study at the Ahmadiyya missionary training institute, illustrates how black Americans were initiated within these networks not just as students, but as leaders. Born Rudolph Thomas in Illinois, American was a “man of the streets.”¹⁰⁴ Thomas was in his early 20s, working at a gambling house, when he heard a street preacher in Chicago “crying out” loudly about Jesus not dying on the cross. The street preacher directed him to the historic Ahmadi mosque in Chicago and told him about *The Moslem Sunrise*. After a year of studying and reading books such as *Ahmadiyyat: The True Islam*, he took the pledge of initiation to the movement in 1947 as Rashid Ahmad. He began praying at the mosque every morning before dawn. Rashid Ahmad volunteered at the *The Moslem Sunrise* office daily, replying to letters and mailing copies across the country. He joined a Pakistani man on a preaching mission to Zion, where they went door-to-door asking residents about Dowie, and successfully advocated for a campaign of social service and preaching in Zion to strategically engage locals with Ahmadiyyat. Rashid Ahmad took a job at a grocery exchange for a year to save up enough money to visit the movement’s headquarters in Rabwah, Pakistan.¹⁰⁵

“The more I read, the more truth I acquired, and the more truth I acquired the more insatiable grew my thirst,” Rashid Ahmad recalled. “It was as if I was quenching my thirst with

¹⁰⁴ Naser-ud-Din Shams, *Perseverance: The Story of al-Haj Rashid Ahmad American (1923-2015)* (Maryland: Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, 2016), 22.

¹⁰⁵ After Partition, the Ahmadiyya movement moved its headquarters from Qadian, India, to a parcel of land in Pakistan that the movement established as the city of Rabwah. In 1984, as government persecution ramped up, Ghulam Ahmad’s fourth caliph Mirza Tahir Ahmad moved the headquarters to the United Kingdom.

the saltwater of Islam.”¹⁰⁶ He asked the caliph about receiving religious education from the community’s Jamia Ahmadiyya missionary training institution and dedicating himself to preaching. The caliph agreed that it “would enable [him] to carry the torch of light to [his] fellow countrymen still living in spiritual darkness.”¹⁰⁷ When Rashid Ahmad arrived in Rabwah in 1949, he was met at the train station by the caliph himself. He soon began attending daily classes in Arabic and Islamic studies, married a local Ahmadiyya woman, frequently met Mufti Sadiq and other prominent missionaries, and began keeping a diary of his experiences shadowing the caliph closely for the next five years. At the training school, he founded an association of U.S. students and was assigned duties, including introducing American journalists and professors to the caliph, giving them copies of *The Moslem Sunrise* and English literature, speaking before Pakistani and U.S. government officials, and contacting diplomats.

Before he returned to the U.S. with his wife and children to serve as a missionary in St. Louis, he took the pledge of allegiance at the hands of the caliph and received the appellation “American” to mark his identity. Soon after reaching St. Louis, he found that a childhood friend he had been preaching to had converted to Islam, as had ten other friends who were now congregants at his mosque. Within a few years, Rashid Ahmad became the national president of the movement. In the years that followed, he became the president of the Milwaukee chapter, where he founded and ran an accredited Ahmadiyya school that ran for a decade. By 1998, he completed the hajj pilgrimage along with several other black American Ahmadiyya leaders, some of whom are still alive today. These leaders include Boston’s Rafiq Ahmad Lake and Abid

¹⁰⁶ Shams, *Perseverance*, 28.

¹⁰⁷ Shams, *Perseverance*, 32.

Haneef (whose Urdu-speaking black son, Imam Azhar Haneef, is now the movement's missionary-in-charge and vice president). With many such elderly members now in their final years, the U.S. Ahmadiyya movement has seen renewed interest in recovering its early history.

Conclusion: Recovering the Networks

In 2021, Ahmadiyya leaders in Zion, Illinois laid the foundation stone for the city's first purpose-built mosque. A 14,000 sq. ft structure set to open in 2022 and funded mostly by Ahmadiyya women, the mosque's 70-foot minaret will be a replica of the Minara-tul-Masih, the minaret Ghulam Ahmad constructed in Qadian. The mosque's name is Fateh Azeem: Victory of the Glorious. "This is a reminder of the power of God Almighty and His favor to His chosen ones," the community's national president announced at the foundation stone ceremony, attended by local government officials.¹⁰⁸ The community also plans to construct their own museum there to commemorate Ghulam Ahmad's victory in the mubahala. Through the Zion mosque project, Ahmadiyya Americans are seeking to close the gaps of time and distance to show the fruits of their ongoing missionary work and print jihad in America — and to assert their community's unique truth and its uniquely long history in America.

Over the past decades, as a number of early Ahmadiyya American leaders have passed away, the movement has launched efforts to recover, document and publicize its early history of missionary work and multi-racial Islamic institution- and community-building. The

¹⁰⁸ "First Mosque to be Built in Zion, Illinois," True Islam, Jan. 16, 2022, <https://trueislam.com/first-mosque-built-in-zion-illinois>. For more on how Ahmadis have engaged with the legacy of the Dowie mubahala in Zion and across the U.S., including centenary commemorations and the purchase of the Zion Hotel and community center (which was turned into the third Ahmadiyya mission house in the Chicago metro area), see chapter one of Naqvi, *Chicago Muslims and the Transformation of American Islam*.

organization has launched an African American Ahmadi History Committee, produced a ten-part series examining its history in America for its international satellite television network Muslim Television Ahmadiyya, and displayed a public exhibit called “And They Prayed Too: African-American Journey to Islam.” The magazine *Al Hakam* is currently serializing the research of British Ahmadiyya historian Talha Sami, who is compiling a three-volume history that examines early Ahmadiyyat in America. The movement’s women’s auxiliary will soon publish a book entitled *Women Pioneers of Ahmadiyya USA*. Though some in the community have raced to record oral histories of their memories, especially ahead of its centennial celebrations in 2021, much of the history these figures held has been lost. With the exception of Sadiq and Dowie, much of this history has been forgotten by most Ahmadis, too.

Since the mid-20th century, the U.S. Ahmadiyya community’s demographics have seen major changes. The community now largely comprises immigrant communities, a demographic shift that the U.S. Muslim community more broadly also saw following the Immigration Act of 1965’s elimination of certain immigration quotas. Many Ahmadis arrived as refugees or asylees as anti-Ahmadiyya persecution in Pakistan and other Muslim-majority countries ramped up in the 1970s and ’80s. But many immigrant Muslims that arrived in the same period also brought anti-Ahmadiyya sentiments along with them, cementing a culture of anti-Ahmadiyya sentiment in American Muslim communities more broadly.

Take the case of two high-profile members of the movement today, Qasim Rashid and Mahershala Ali. Both have faced anti-Ahmadiyya sentiment from the American Muslim mainstream as their platforms as entertainers and politicians have grown. Qasim Rashid is an

author, former spokesman for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community USA, and a Pakistani human rights lawyer who in the 2020 election became the Democratic nominee for Virginia's 1st congressional district, earning endorsements from Vice President Joe Biden and other leading Democratic lawmakers. During Rashid's campaign, text messages were forwarded among Virginia-area Muslims, warning them not to vote for a "Qadiani."¹⁰⁹ (The word "Qadiani" is used more often as an anti-Ahmadiyya slur, often used instead of "Muslim," rather than as an inoffensive identifier of the movement's specific branch.) Mahershala Ali is an African American convert to the movement who recently became the first Muslim Oscar-winning actor. He may not have ties to Pakistan himself, but his Ahmadiyya identity still ensures he "faces global anti-Ahmadiyya hostility, or theological critiques from within black Muslim communities more generally, because of sectarian constructions of Islamic 'orthodoxy'" and "global policing of Muslim identity, which is situated within Pakistani sectarian debates."¹¹⁰

Anti-Ahmadiyya sectarianism remains a serious concern for Ahmadis interacting with mainstream Muslim populations in North America. In Northern Virginia, a group of Muslims founded the non-profit Khatme Nubuwwat Center ("Seal of Prophethood") in 2013. "We strive to clarify the theological boundaries of Islam," the organization explains on its website, going on to declare that the belief that the Prophet Muhammad was God's final messenger is such an

¹⁰⁹ Personal communications with Virginia-area Muslims who received these chain messages, Nov 4, 2020.

¹¹⁰ Kristian Peterson, "Intersectional Islamophobia: The Case of a Black Ahmadi Muslim Celebrity," *Journal of Africana Religions* 7, no. 1 (2019): 145-147.

essential Islamic tenet “that the slightest doubt in its validity may bring ones faith to ruin.”¹¹¹ The center is affiliated with the non-profit Idara Dawat-o-Irshad, USA, whose website explicitly describes its major undertakings as teaching about the finality of prophethood, “Exposing Qadiyanism (Ahmadiyyah) cult,” “Warning about fraudulent translations of the Quran and Hadith by Qadiyanism (Ahmadiyyah),” and “Conducting courses/lectures on the reality of Qadiyanism (Ahmadiyyah).” Together, the two organizations have hosted at least one “Final Prophet Conference.” Ahmadiyya activists who attended the event reported that speakers “condemned the Ahmadis and held them responsible for discouraging Muslims from partaking in violent Jihad.”¹¹² Several speakers, including both visiting scholars from Pakistan and leaders of local mosques, allegedly described Ahmadis as Satanic, “infidels,” “imposters” “accursed,” and a “cancer.” Like Sunni preacher Satti Majid attempted to do nearly a century prior, one speaker urged legal measures to prevent Ahmadis from being able to “pose” as Muslims in America. Several urged Muslims to boycott Ahmadis and refuse to dialogue with them.¹¹³

While contemporary Sunni hegemony in America is popularly read into the past, the reality is that these boundaries were once much more fluid and blurred. To be sure, sectarian frictions and tensions have always been present over the past century. Webb’s decision not to

¹¹¹ “About KNC,” Khatme Nabuwwat Center, accessed March 12, 2022, <http://www.kncenter.org/about-knc.html>. As Yohanan Friedmann studies in *Prophecy Continuous* (1989), some prominent medieval Muslim thinkers have been open to the notion of ongoing prophecy, including figures who have been embraced by contemporary South Asian Sunni movements claiming to defend the seal of the prophethood.

¹¹² Kashif Chaudhry, “At An Extremist Rally Near Nation’s Capital, Armed Jihad Glorified, ‘Infidels’ Condemned,” *The Huffington Post*, Nov. 21, 2017, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/at-an-extremist-rally-near-nations-capital-armed_b_5a10e147e4b0e6450602ebbb.

¹¹³ Ehzan Rehan, “Pakistani-American Muslims call for restrictions against ‘non-Muslims,’” *Rabwah.net*, Nov. 20, 2017, <https://www.rabwah.net/american-islamists-hold-fundraiser-virginia>.

meet Ghulam Ahmad, Sadiq's departure from Detroit, and some Ahmadiyya sheikhs' break with the movement shows this. But the thick webs linking these seemingly disparate figures and movements offer a picture that is richer, more complex — and much less comfortable. Sunni communities today may want to distance themselves from narratives that claim historical Ahmadiyya influence. Ahmadis today largely want to distance themselves from the ideologies of the Nation of Islam, Moorish Science Temple, and other communities that Ahmadis themselves consider heterodox. Similarly, many in the Nation as well as the followers of Imam W.D. Mohammed would disavow any links to the Ahmadiyya. But scholars must probe and grapple with the webs that connect these communities, their institutions, and their beliefs. Scholars cannot rely solely on these communities' documentation of their own histories. Doing so will result in countless stories, figures and encounters being erased from these networks.

This paper briefly recounted a few examples of Ahmadiyya missionary encounters in the 19th and 20th century U.S. that have been marginalized or elided in most scholarship, including the cases of John Alexander Dowie, M.A.R. Webb, Duse Muhammad Ali, Mufti Muhammad Sadiq, Siddiqatun Nisa Rahatullah, Nadirah Osman, Wali Akram, Nasir Ahmad, Rashid Ahmad American, and Muhammad Abdullah. The technologies that facilitated these encounters included official and unofficial missionaries, public lectures, correspondence, articles and circulars in mainstream newspapers, and Ahmadiyya journals such as *The Moslem Sunrise*, *The Review of Religions*, and *The Islamic Review*. It also included missionaries' careful observation of America's religious, social, and cultural milieu, and using this knowledge to strategically tap into the networks of and shape movements with overlapping ideals and ideologies, such

Theosophy, Pan-Africanism, and black nationalism. And in the case of Ghulam Ahmad's Lahori heirs, it also involved strategic use of syncretism to cultivate an Islamic orientation. In studying these nodes and networks, normative assumptions about American Islam's exclusively masculine Sunni past are put to question. We also see how the range of Ahmadiyya contributions to American Islam have often been rendered invisible because they were indexed either "heterodox" (as in the case of Sadiq's missionizing) or "orthodox" (as in the case of *The Islamic Review*, the Ahmadiyya-linked sheikhs who launched early Black Sunni initiatives, and the Ahmadiyya imam who visited Malcolm X in prison).

This project is not about recovering all of this history. Instead, it has sought to demonstrate that through looking at networks and engagements we can understand that, in the Ahmadiyya case, what is imagined to be at the periphery is often at the center. The Ahmadiyya movement did not comprise a separate axis of Muslim life in America, but moved within and helped create mainstream Muslim spaces and culture. From its unique emphasis on print jihad to its expansion of prophethood and revelation, from the Theosophical turn to the rise of Garveyism, the Ahmadiyya movement was squarely in the center of these early developments in the production of a unique American Islam. In studying these engagements, one must begin to map American cities such as Zion, Illinois and St. Louis, Missouri into the global network of Islam, radically expanding the boundaries of where we can look to for Islam's "representative sites and cities."¹¹⁴ For Webb, his contact with the Ahmadiyya movement is imagined to be marginal to his conversion and his mission; in fact, I argue, it remains pivotal to his

¹¹⁴ Aliyah Khan, *Far from Mecca: Globalizing the Muslim Caribbean* (United States: Rutgers University Press, 2020), 205.

understandings of and engagement with Islam. Sadiq is known to be at the center of the Ahmadiyya movements story in this country, but peripheral to the American Muslim story — while in fact he is pivotal to this broader history as well. Ahmadiyya theology is often understood to have only contributed to the multiracial model of American Islam, but in fact its emphasis on a print jihad of the pen, its British-inspired missionary model, and its understandings of continuous prophecy have also left their imprint on American Muslim movements that came after it.

Through examining these encounters and exchanges, and tracking interaction and influence rather than affiliation, we can come to a fuller understanding of Islam's development in America. We can also expand our understanding of the Ahmadiyya movement's influence and inheritors to include figures and institutions that are not connected to the movement in public memory.

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