

FOURTH INSTALLMENT

A PRIMER: New Afrikan History of Struggle and Perspective

“We got to stop the nervous Nellies
and the Toms from going to the
Man’s place. I don’t believe in killing,
but a good whipping behind
the bushes wouldn’t hurt them.”

—Fannie Lou Hammer

INTRODUCTION

In the Third Installment it was offered how New Afrikan people, despite the brunt of white nationalist violence and oppression, evolved in creating spaces for enlightenment. Beyond the church and spiritual revivals, Black people brought into existence a new aesthetic cultural determination. This determination manifested itself in Literature, drama and music, capturing the imagination of Black folks’ truths in their own language divorced of white folks’ influences. It was so indelible, profound, and pervasive it had to be defined as the Harlem Renaissance, although it traversed the world. The cultural dynamic of the Harlem Renaissance was not unlike the international acceptance of today’s rap/hip-hop music and culture. New Afrikan people forged ahead, finding solace within their expressions of survival—like the old plantation songs and spirituals, this new aesthetics conveyed a “fight-back” determination of an uncompromising Black identity.

These were the conditions that Marcus Mosiah Garvey emerged from with his ‘Back to Africa’ movement, manifesting a political tone and texture to a growing and heightened Black consciousness. Marcus Garvey’s philosophy sought to return Black peoples’ thoughts back to the motherland (Maafa). Marcus Garvey extended Black consciousness to an African consciousness—that we are an Afrikan people. His promotional and oratory skills were superb, unrivaled to this day, creating a Pan-Afrikanist movement 6 million strong.

But also during this period Black people continued to suffer the violence of white nationalists in its most virulent acts of brutality. The murder of 3,000 Black people in Tulsa, the killing of scores of Black people in New York, Chicago, etc. in White riots further exacerbated the racial divide in this country. Hence, the importance of these installments, they providing American history hidden in the archives not being taught because of the hard inescapable truths they bare. As Fannie Lou Hammer stated above, we must always be cautious of the “nervous Nellies and Toms”—those who will compromise and sell-out the struggle, like what happened to Marcus Garvey, leading to his imprisonment and deportation. Obviously, this is part of the class struggle within our national liberation struggle much discussed in my book “We Are Our Own Liberators” especially as it pertains to the “Three Phase Theory for National Independence”.

Fourth Installment

The Struggle Continues!

1925. It is impossible to not discuss another important leader during the same period of Marcus Garvey. The unsung hero and labor organizer of that time was Asa Philip Randolph, an

avowed Socialist. He was born April 15, 1889, in Crescent City, Florida, to a minister and seamstress, both of whom had been slaves. Growing up, he worked as an elevator operator, porter and waiter in NYC, attending City College at night. As an advocate of nonviolence, A. Philip Randolph joined the Socialist Party in 1918, a year after he and Chandler Owens established the socialist magazine the “Messenger”. In 1918, he was jailed for opposing World War I, critically denouncing the President’s sending troops into war. In 1920, he became an effective and persuasive labor organizer, demanding Blacks’ inclusion in employment opportunities, to receive the same wages as whites. In 1925, after 12 years battling with the Pullman Company, he organized the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the first Black organized and established labor union. He fought with the American Federation of Labor, who in 1919 voted to end racial discrimination in its membership, giving Randolph the first international charter of an all Black union in the 47 year history of the AFL. At 36 years old A. Philip Randolph, in 1936, in Chicago was elected the President of the National Negro Congress. The Congress had been formed as an institution to fight for Black labor rights, business and economic opportunities, convening 817 delegates and 500 organizations, an astounding achievement that has yet to be matched.

These remarkable Black socialist accomplishments were long established before Martin Luther King, Jr.’s march on Washington in 1963. A. Philip Randolph was the third Black man to be invited to the White House to meet the sitting President. His meeting with President Franklin D. Roosevelt was subject to resolving Randolph’s threat to bring 100,000 marchers to Washington, D.C. in 1941—what he called a “nonviolent demonstration of Negro mass power.” Randolph’s March on Washington Movement (MOWM) was not going to be contained or controlled as what happened in 1963, and Roosevelt had few options to prevent it from happening. The MOWM demanded Blacks be granted jobs in the defense industries and the ending of discrimination in the work force. Days before the July 1, 1941 march, Roosevelt met with Randolph and agreed to his demands, issuing Executive Order #8802, declaring “there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color or national origin.” Roosevelt also agreed to establish a Fair Employment Practice Committee, to further review and implement Executive Order #8802. Based on this agreement A. Philip Randolph called off the march, which was supported by all major Black newspapers and publications.

In 1955, A. Philip Randolph and William S. Townsend were elected vice presidents of the merged AFL-CIO; then, in 1960, Randolph, displeased with the slow progress in ending discrimination in the AFL-CIO, went on to build the Negro American Labor Council in his continuing fight on behalf of the Black working class. When the AFL-CIO failed to endorse the 1963 March on Washington, he resoundingly criticized the organization for its continued failure to desegregate and join a national determination against racial discrimination. A. Philip Randolph, as an elder statesman of the civil rights movement, assisted in the organizing of the 1963 March on Washington, joining Martin L. King, Jr., when he made his famous “I Have A Dream” speech. In 1964, A. Philip Randolph and Leontyne Price were awarded the Medal of Freedom by President Johnson.

This abbreviated recounting of A. Philip Randolph’s storied life does not give due credit to his sacrifices, bravery and his adherence to socialism. This son of former slaves in his lifetime relentlessly fought to preserve the dignity of Black folks in honest labor, opposed imperialist wars, and distinguished himself as an anticapitalist socialist. It must be noted today, the

American labor organizations continue to have a conflicted relationship with Black workers. Discrimination in the work force has created undeniable economic disparity. Such disparity has not abated since the ending of chattel slavery, despite the noble efforts of fighters like A. Philip Randolph, etc., or the philosophical polemics as espoused by Marcus Garvey as to Black people's identity being second class citizens in America.

Due to the pernicious and nefarious reality of white nationalism, and the greater failure of the overwhelming majority of Euro-Americans to challenge their countrymen on the institutions upholding white supremacy, we find the entire country suffering the anxieties of rivaling narratives of what it means to be an American. Needless to say, a nation divided against itself cannot stand!

1930. Other than Marcus Mosiah Garvey, there has been no other "race" man to have an indelible impact on Black life in America than the Honorable Elijah Muhammad and his Nation of Islam movement. Born Elijah Poole on October 7, 1897, in Sanderville, Georgia, Elijah Poole left school after completing the third grade and began working the fields to help support his sharecropping family. His parents, William and Marie Poole, had 12 other children to raise in the difficult rural South. Before the 1920's, Elijah Poole married Clara Evans, who bore him eight children. In April 1923, like many Blacks who migrated from the South, he and family moved from Macon, Georgia to Detroit, Michigan, getting a job with the Southern Railroad Company and the Cherokee Brick Company. Elijah Poole recognized the racial and class conflicts and scourge of deprivation exacerbated by the "Great Depression."

It was during this time that a foreign-born door to door peddler selling his wares appeared in Detroit, preaching his version of the religion of Islam. Wallace Fard Muhammad or Wallace D. Fard identified himself as the personified Allah, whose purpose was to teach the Black man his original religion. It should be mentioned during this period there were several "religious" persons whose espoused doctrine was a mission to uplift the Black race. Such as father Divine and Daddy Grace evolved a congregation of religious "race" identity and salvation. However, Master Fard Muhammad sought to upturn the socio-psychological conditions of Black belief systems that supported the ideal of a slave mentality that had been associated with Christian teachings. Master Fard Muhammad's objective was to reverse that mentality by introducing religious teaching in complete opposition to Christian belief system. According to Master Fard Muhammad, the white man represented the devil and all that is evil, and the Black man in his pure essence is godly, and that God is One, not subject to division as taught by Christian trinity. Master Fard Muhammad taught that Islam is the original religion of the Black man, and he became known in the city of Detroit as the preacher from the East, establishing his Temple of Islam.

In 1931, Elijah Poole heard about this preacher from his wife, who wanted to attend his sermons. However, he went instead, hearing his first sermon at the Temple of Islam and soon after accepted the religion of Islam. Elijah Poole taught his family the teachings of Master Fard Muhammad's Islam. Having become an ardent student of Master Fard Muhammad, Elijah changed his name to Elijah Karriem and became a minister of what had grown into the Nation of Islam. After being promoted to the "Supreme Minister" of the Nation of Islam, Elijah again changed his name to Elijah Muhammad, and for nearly four years, Master Fard Muhammad tutored and groomed his anticipated successor. In 1934, Elijah Muhammad established the official newspaper titled "The Final Call to Islam," in which the teachings of Master Fard Muhammad were published and distributed. Elijah Muhammad assisted in the development of

business and educational programs for the Nation of Islam. The Temple's Islamic school was eventually closed by the Michigan Board of Education in 1934, and Muslim teachers were jailed for allegedly contributing to the delinquency of minors, because the students weren't in public Schools. Needless to say, the U.S. Government began a campaign of harassment to contain and eventually eliminate this new religion. In September 1934, Elijah Muhammad moved his family from Detroit to Chicago, where he continued to face harassment, and soon followed Master Fard Muhammad, who was allegedly deported, leaving the mission of the Nation of Islam to Elijah Muhammad.

In 1935, Elijah Muhammad traveled to Washington D.C., to study books on Islam and other materials held in the Library of Congress. Also, having assumed the leadership of the Nation of Islam, he received several death threats from internal conflicts requiring his hiatus in Washington, D.C., changing his identity and functioning to a large extent incognito. On May 8, 1942, while in Washington, D.C., he was arrested for evading the draft. The draft had been instituted for 18-44 year olds in support of WWII; however, Elijah Muhammad was older than 45 years and ineligible for the draft. He and many other Muslims were imprisoned as conscientious objectors to the war. In his book "Message to the Blackman" he stated "I was a Muslim and would not take part in war and especially not on the side of the infidels." He was released from prison at the conclusion of the war, when he returned to Chicago to resurrect the then tattered religious organization. Elijah Muhammad expanded his organization with the development of Black capitalist philosophy and entrepreneurship, and establishing a new publication, "The Muhammad Speaks." The newspaper propagated the ideal of the Black man being godly, that Allah is Black, and that Black people need to divorce themselves of white Christianity, and build their own economic power. This ultimately appealed to many of the disenfranchised and lower class inhabitants of the Black community, transforming them into disciplined Muslim representatives of the Nation of Islam.

In 1952, Malcolm X, after his release from prison, moved to Chicago and began working intimately with Elijah Muhammad, they forming a teacher-student relationship not unlike Elijah Muhammad with Master Fard Muhammad. Eventually, Elijah promoted Malcolm X as his National Spokesperson, and under Malcolm X's stewardship the Black Muslim movement grew to 100,000 strong with 33 Temples across the country. In 1955, the Calypso singer and performer Louis Eugene Walcott enrolled in the Nation of Islam, mentoring under Malcolm X, growing to become a favorite of Elijah Muhammad after the death of Malcolm X. Louis Walcott changed his name, rising to a position as Minister Louis Farrakhan.

Although the teaching of Elijah Muhammad was a far departure from orthodox Sunni Islam exegesis, in 1955, he visited the Holy City of Mecca to perform "Umrah"—the ritual of offering subservient obedience to the will of Allah (SWT). Because of the growth and development of the Nation of Islam, it came under the scrutiny of the F.B.I., and was identified as a "Black Hate Group" under COINTELPRO. In 1960, Elijah Muhammad, in a major rally in New York City addressing his followers, called for the creation of a Black nation in the U.S. He identified the Black Belt south as the traditional homeland of the Black man in America. He took on the honorific attribute of The Honorable Elijah Muhammad, and with his religious philosophy and Black capitalist aspirations charged the Nation of Islam to build business enterprises. His Black capitalist economic development program established farms, rental and private homes, restaurants, food processing centers, clothing factories, import & export businesses, business

leagues, etc. Not unlike the aspirations of Marcus Garvey, The Honorable Elijah Muhammad sought the socio-economic and political independence of Black people in America.

In 1964, Minister Malcolm X was forced out of the Nation of Islam, first having been suspended for defying an edict by The Honorable Elijah Muhammad to not comment on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. However, when Malcolm X stated the killing was as a matter of “the chickens coming home to roost,” it set off a firestorm of negative media that The Honorable Elijah Muhammad sought to avoid. Allegedly, COINTELPRO elements within the hierarchy of the Nation of Islam created an environment of acrimony to prevent reconciliation between The Honorable Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X, leading to Malcolm X’s resignation from the Nation of Islam. This acrimony was exacerbated by COINTELPRO, eventually leading to the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965. With the removal of Malcolm X, Louis Farrakhan rose to the esteemed position as National Spokesperson of the Nation of Islam.

In 1966, The Honorable Elijah Muhammad, at his home in Chicago, met with Dr. Martin L. King, Jr., discussing their mutual concerns about the conditions of Black people in America. However, The Honorable Elijah Muhammad believed in the necessity of Black independence, while Dr. King sought integration and assimilation in capitalist America.

The primary ideological agreement between the two was both were capitalists, and believed the system of capitalism would bring salvation to Black people in America. In 1975, The Honorable Elijah Muhammad passed away in his home in Chicago, and his son Wallace Muhammad took over the reins and leadership of the Nation of Islam. By instructions from his father, for years he had been trained in orthodox Islam in Saudi Arabia. He eventually changed his name to Warith Deen Muhammad, and sought to guide the Nation of Islam to a more traditional and orthodox practice of Islam. He changed the original name of Nation of Islam to the American Muslim Mission, and their identity from Black Muslim to “Bilalians”—named after the first Black Afrikan convert to Islam. This change was a shock to the body of the Nation of Islam movement, creating a split among the original converts. The split led Minister Louis Farrakhan and stalwart adherents of The Honorable Elijah Muhammad’s original teachings to resurrect the Nation of Islam.

EPILOGUE

How can anyone deny that jail and prison is a consequence of resistance? Marcus Garvey, A. Philip Randolph, Elijah Muhammad, Martin L. King, Jr., Malcolm X—the list goes on—have experienced jail and prison. Also, that challenges to the system of racist oppression will cause the federal police to attempt to destroy your organizing and/or movement. In essence, Black resistance to national oppression will be suppressed by the government, often violently. But for the persistent and committed, change is possible, as A. Philip Randolph was a profound change agent in the labor struggles in the U.S. His belief in socialism demanded he initiate campaigns to improve the conditions of the Black working class. He understood the potential of mass and popular organizing into a national movement, forcing President Franklin D. Roosevelt to issue Executive Order #8802 to end discrimination in the military industries and the federal work force. His challenges of the AFL created the environment to broaden the work opportunities of Black folks; at the same time, he opposed U.S. imperialist war efforts. He was not the only Black socialist engaged in Labor struggles during that time, in Alabama there was Hosea Hudson, a Communist Party member and organizer of the Alabama Sharecroppers’ Union, made extreme sacrifices on behalf of Black farmers in the South (Read: Hammer and

Hoe: The Alabama Communist Party 1928-1951). Randolph definitely broke barriers of historic import that impact today's American work force. What we also find is the continuum from one era of struggle into the next; there have always been those who rise to the challenge, fighting against racist oppression and capitalist exploitation.

Elijah Muhammad, taking a page from the historic tome of Marcus Garvey, employed a socio-cultural religious tactic to break the barrier of Black folks' psycho-cultural inferiority disorder to white supremacist religiosity. His teaching of Black Muslim philosophy and practice recognized Marcus Garvey's 'Back to Afrika' movement was a farfetched idea, and therefore sought to create the socio-economic and cultural environment for the establishment of Black nationhood in the U.S. His teachings argued in order to build toward Black nationhood, it is necessary to destroy the inferiority complex of Black folks and their indoctrination of being subservient to white supremacy in all of its manifestations. The most dominant of such white indoctrination being that God is a white blue-eyed blond demanding Black folks' worship. Unfortunately, this indoctrination continues to be pervasive, leading to Black enemies of Black people who oppose adherence to white dominance in any form. What Malcolm X identified as "House Negroes" who are prepared to save "massa's" house from burning to the detriment of their own Black family. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad was instrumental in establishing the principle ideal of "Black Power"—first by empowering the consciousness that Blackness is not evil, but rather in his philosophy "Godly"—making Allah a Black man, and arguing that Islam is the Black man's original religion. Furthermore, his Nation of Islam forged the ideal of Black economic independence as part of the empowering determinant. Lastly, The Honorable Elijah Muhammad identified the Black Belt south as the traditional homeland of Black people, arguing for national independence and nationhood. This objective has been adopted and forwarded by such revolutionary nationalist organizations as the Republic of New Afrika, while the Black Panther Party included this potential objective as part of its Ten Point Program and Platform. Although the Nation of Islam today is not forthcoming on the question of independence and nationhood, there is no denying one of the historical foundations of this objective originates with The Honorable Elijah Muhammad.

Remember: We Are Our Own Liberators!

Rev. Love & Unity

Jalil A. Muntaqim

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