

INHERITORS OF THE FAITH

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JAMES H. CONE: The spiritual and the political are intimately related, but the spiritual is the foundation for everything.

NARRATOR: The passion for change in the 1960's gave rise to a new spiritual consciousness. For some African Americans this meant moving beyond Christianity to call God by another name.

NARRATOR: One man risked his family and rejected his birthright to create a new community of faith.

WARITH DEEN MOHAMMED: I'm not only having difficulty saying my father's no more this high figure here... But I'm having difficulty too, rejecting what they told me I—about myself: that you were chosen before you were born.

NARRATOR: In the face of commitment to family, tradition, and religion, how does faith answer the call to destiny?

NARRATOR: For hundreds of years African Americans prayed to a God they were convinced would deliver them from oppression. Their freedom faith had led them out of the pews and into the struggle for civil rights. (slow read)

NARRATOR: But as that struggle dragged on...even some ministers active in the civil rights movement began to feel that Christianity had failed to meet the challenge of segregation.

ADAM CLAYTON POWELL, JR: I believe that Christianity in the United States has been dragging its feet and I don't think there's any other force in America that has been more detrimental to the solution of our racial problems than Christianity. And the fact that there is more segregation in The United States of America on Sunday morning at 11 O'clock than in any other time in our nation alike is the tragic proof of what I am stating.

NARRATOR: Even after segregation was outlawed, it persisted. A younger generation attacked the Christian principles of the movement. They found their faith in a declaration of racial pride.

STOKLEY CARMICHAEL: Obviously white folks even got a monopoly on Jesus Christ.

NARRATOR: Stokley Carmichael had led the student wing of the civil rights movement.

STOKLEY CARMICHAEL: They came to Africa, to make us civilized. They came to Africa to tell us about Jesus Christ. We were in Africa – they were in Europe. They had the Bible, we had the land. They came to be missionaries. When they left, they had the land, we still have the Bible.

NARRATOR: Carmichael founded the Black Power Movement. Black Power ignited the demand for a declaration of racial pride and revolutionized the way African Americans saw themselves.

ABIODUN OYEWOLE: Black power was a real big door that just opened up for us to come from behind the wall of being all of the stereotypes and all of the things that had been said about us for so many years. Now we are going to experience having power to say things about ourselves, and doing it without permission.

NARRATOR: The Black Power movement expanded the notion of faith for African Americans. Some discovered the African roots of that faith and moved to embrace it in traditions like Yoruba. Yoruba is a West African religion whose rituals were lost during enslavement but resurfaced just before the rise of the Black Power movement.

BARBARA BARRETT: ...the fact that the religion is based in Africa, the foundation is there, was very attractive to me because especially when I realized the depth of the system, the depth of the theology.... and the amount of emphasis it places on the individual. But when I say that, I want to say that cautiously because if there's focus on the individual, because each individual is required to and responsible for developing on their own to the fullest.

NARRATOR: Yoruba worshippers walk and talk with their deities the way black Christians walk and talk with Jesus.

RACHEL HARDING: People are looking for traditions that are going to sustain them through the struggles, the daily struggles, the ordinary struggles, the extraordinary struggles that people have to deal with, living in this society.

NARRATOR: In 1967, Detroit and Newark burned with an anger an frustration for which there appeared to be no spiritual balm. As the fires simmered, the challenge of Black power forced devout Christians like the Reverend James Cone to wrestle with their faith.

JAMES H. CONE: I got the feeling of what it meant to either stay where I was or go somewhere else. And for me, at that time, the question was will I remain a Christian. I was within inches of leaving the Christian faith because that faith as I

had received it and as it had been taught to me no longer explained the world to me satisfactorily.

NARRATOR: While Cone struggled with the doctrines of his faith, some African American artists reclaimed Christianity and re-imagined Jesus in their own image.

ABIODUN OYEWOLE: We just put all kinds of stuff into Jesus. In the inside, he was a real funky black man that understood what black folks are going through and could eat hominy grits, collard greens and cornbread and chicken, and understood that. It wasn't— I mean, Jesus was-was a funky dude, for us.

NARRATOR: Black artists seized music poetry and dance and made the arts a palette to address the political issues of the day. The movement on the streets spurred James Cone to make Christianity as relevant.

JAMES H. CONE: The force of my resistance to the white dominant culture and its interpretation of the Christian faith, is that there is a subversive side to the Christian faith which is free of white interpretation, a subversive dimension. And my task is to connect to that subversive side so that I can be within the mainstream, but be prophetic within that mainstream and be a thorn in the flesh of those who would deny black people their humanity

NARRATOR: Rev. Cone's book, Black Theology and Black Power, became that thorn. His vision combined Black Power with the gospel message of salvation and made Jesus a soldier fighting on the side of justice.

JAMES H. CONE: The presupposition of black theology is how can we worship a God who comes from our enslavers? So I had to rethink that premise and say that God did not come from the slaveholders, but in spite of them. In fact, the Bible is not a book that is controlled by slaveholders, black people, oppressed people have to be their own interpreters of the faith.

NARRATOR: The most controversial interpreters of the faith during the 1960's was The Nation of Islam. They offered a brand of Islam tailored to the oppressed black masses. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad was their leader.

ELIJAH MUHAMMAD: "I'm your blood and your flesh. White people are not your brothers, they're not your blood and your flesh!"

NARRATOR: The Nation tapped into black anger and disillusionment. Some members of the Nation of Islam believed Elijah Muhammad was a prophet, some believed the messenger of God --- and some believed him to be God in the flesh...

ELIJAH MUHAMMAD: “I represent to you, not a prophet. But I represent to you, God in person.”

NARRATOR: They believed – not in black equality – but black superiority. The Nation of Islam seemed to be the spiritual expression of the Black Power Movement.

RICHARD TURNER: They had millions of dollars of real estate; they had their own bank; they had the, um, newspaper, *Muhammad Speaks*, with the largest circulation of any black newspaper in America, farm lands, um -- um, you know, many, many millions of dollars of assets.

NARRATOR: The Nation of Islam had emerged from the black working class neighborhoods of Detroit during the 1930s. It's founder, W.D. Fard, a pale-skinned man invented a theology in which whites were the devils, and blacks, the creators of the universe.

RICHARD TURNER: He talked about white people, as the inverse of black people, who he presented as kind of, um, a divine group of people, and the white people, according to W.D. Fard, were involved in devilish kinds of behavior in terms of racism and economic inequities, which they had perpetrated on the black community.

ELIJAH MUHAMMAD: “Salaam alakem.....in the name of Allah...holy praises is due...”

NARRATOR: Elijah Muhammad used traditional greetings but he did not teach from Islam's holy book the Qur'an. Instead he used the Bible.

DON MUHAMMAD: The Bible was used specifically because we, as black people, had never seen the Holy Koran. We'd never heard of it. We were really in the Bible. So his thorough knowledge of the Bible was tremendous. There's much good in the Bible, though it was referred to as a poison book by the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. But penicillin too is poison. But it will help you if it's administered by a good doctor.

HASAN SHARIF: And most of those people in the Nation of Islam, most of those people were Baptists, ...come up in the Baptist church, and they(OS) were—again they were God-fearing people. They [were] people with-with a good strong moral base. But they couldn't reconcile those Christian teachings with what they experienced in their daily lives.

WARITH DEEN MOHAMMED: I loved my father. I love-love-love him more now. I didn't dislike the Nation of Islam. I didn't dis-dislike their disciplines, their spirit, their brotherhood. I loved it!

NARRATOR: Wallace Muhammad, the seventh child of Elijah Muhammad, was the prophesied heir to his father nation within a nation. In public, Elijah Muhammad stood first. Most people then saw national spokesman Malcolm X. Wallace Muhammad was groomed for leadership in the background.

WARITH DEEN MOHAMMED: I don't think any child who's raised from infancy by his parents, to believe that his father was so high up in the world of mankind that he was speaking directly with God, or got his message directly from God, I don't think any child would want to see that destroyed or want to get away from that. You're very special when your father's that special.

NARRATOR: Elijah Muhammad 's teachings promised that discipline would free the black man from the prison of race. The Nation trained an elite corp of men to protect itself and ensure internal structure. Called the Fruit of Islam, their training began as young boys.

YOUNG BOY: Brother David 2X, Camden, New Jersey.

Q: What about you?

YOUNG BOY:New York.

Q: From New York City...How do you feel today brothers?...

RESPONSE: Fine.

Q: Isn't it a blessing today to see the Hon. Elijah Muhammad? What about you brother, how do you feel about the Hon. Elijah Muhammad?

YOUNG BOY: Elijah Muhammad is trying to teach all our original people, they are in bad shape. (yeah – go ahead brother) The Honorable Elijah Muhammad is trying to wake them up. (**Q:** You think he can do it?) - Yes sir!

Q: He's the only man with a program, right? Good enough.

JOHN BILAL: One of my jobs was to organize the Junior Fruit. And so I'd get the fellows in a line, little boys I mean from 5-6 years old up until, you know, maybe 15 years old, because at 16 you became a– .. a Senior Fruit, and we'd march down the road and start peeling off into people's homes. And so the last person would go in front of the first person, and so on and so forth, until we canvassed the whole neighborhood.

NARRATOR: Nation members preached their brand of Islam anywhere black people gathered, even churches. They called it "fishing for the dead."

HASAN SHARIF: We were taught that we had to go out and bring in the dead. And people were not alive, or dead to the knowledge of themselves. And we would say to them that...those basic teachings we had at that time: The white man is the devil. He's the cause of all your problems, and he-he loves it when he sees you drinking this alcohol and taking this dope. And we've got a life-giving message for you that you need to hear; and come with us and-and transform or change your life.

DON MUHAMMAD: As a matter of fact we refer to our brothers and sisters as lost-found until they heard the message. And then after they heard the message, they would have been found. So there was always the push, the initiative to get people to read the newspaper, to read the articles and books, come to the mosque, any place that you could, to get our people first to hear the message of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad.

NARRATOR: The disciplines and intensity of conversion into the Nation of Islam made the larger black community view them with alarm and suspicion.

NI'MAT ABDUS SAMAD: My family, in general, at first was really not very accepting of me becoming a Muslim, I used to have to take my clothes from home, go to a friend's house, get dressed and changed, and go to -- to the temple it was then, and then perform there whatever I was going to do, then go back to her house and change clothes, and then, um, go home, because my stepmother would have totally died if I had worn, you know, a long dress and covered my head coming in her house, because what would the neighbors say?

ABIODUN OYEWOLE: Many black people were totally intimidated by the Nation of Islam. I mean, here you got a bunch of brothers, some brothers who had been seen maybe 2-3 months ago looking kind of junkified, looking kind of run down, looking like they were going to bust into your crib and take your TV. Now all of a sudden the same brother's walking around with a bow tie,.. a white shirt and a suit. His hair's clean, got combed neat, and he's got the *Muhammad Speaks* paper, or he's got a [bean pie] in-in his hand, and he's trying to sell you. And Ain't you the same guy that climbed that climbed into my aunt's house and tried to steal her TV? Oh you went to prison and you got into the Nation of Islam? Oh you changed. Oh! So it was-- it was deep. But because they were so regimentated, because they were so precise and-and-and direct and never wavering about what they were about, they were really an intimidation to quite a number of black people.

MALCOLM X: There was a time when we used to drool in the mouth over white people...

NARRATOR: The Nation of Islam advocated racial separatism and rejected non-violent resistance. The Nation's most popular spokesman was Malcolm X, one of many who converted to the Nation while in prison.

MALCOLM X: "They call Mr. Muhammad a black supremacist, because he teaches you and me, not only that we're as good as the white man, but better than the white man! You find that old pale thing, laying out in the sun, trying to get to look like you! That old pale thing."

NARRATOR: Civil rights leaders called this group of Moslems thugs and urged the FBI to investigate. The leading civil rights organization denounced the Nation's separatist philosophy.

ROY WILKINS: "The preaching of racial hatred and racial advantage, and the bigotry involved is a bad thing whether it's colored or white. For years the NAACP was opposed to white extremist preaching hatred of Negro people. And we are equally opposed to Negro extremist preaching against white people simply for the sake of whiteness."

NARRATOR: Meanwhile the Nation of Islam pursued the hearts and minds of black America.

ELIJAH MUHAMMAD: Many of you waiting around hoping that the white man will soften up. There's nothing in him to soften! He was created evil!

DON MUHAMMAD: I have to be very honest. I did not agree with the civil rights movement. I did not feel that turning the other cheek was what we needed. I thought it left our people vulnerable, particularly our women. They turned fire hoses and dogs on our people. It brought tears to my eyes when I saw those women being turned upside down with those fire hoses. And we in the Nation of Islam just did not feel that was appropriate

JAMES H. CONE: See, it's important for us to understand that the Nation of Islam was the only religious and community of black people who were unashamed of being black. Now, with that proclamation being so strong and with separatism as a dimension of that proclamation, where black people don't have to be with white people in order to be full human beings, that hit the Civil Rights movement and the mainstream black church movement really hard, and it shocked us because the dominant ethos in the 50's and the early 60's, the first half of it anyway, the dominant ethos was integration, which means assimilating and going into white institutions, even white churches, and etc, white schools, white everything. Now and here was Malcolm and the Nation of Islam saying "NO" to that. Well, that was frightening to us because deep down we knew that they were telling the truth, but we didn't want to hear that truth.

ELIJAH MUHAMMAD: “You say, we are on the road now to a better world, because the white man promised integration. I consider this offer to be nothing but a very shrewd offer made to deceive you!”

NARRATOR: Although they would never become converts, many black people outside of the Nation of Islam secretly admired its outspokenness and openly applauded their “do for self” economic creed.

NI’MAT ABDUS SAMAD: There was a sense of loyalty, I remember, and we often say it now, those of us who were in the Nation, the loyalty in terms of do for your brother what you would do for yourself -- or sister. We never (laughs) heard sister as much as we heard brother, but all of that, you know, the nation building, the coming together, the doing for self. All of those were very attractive to me, and in retrospect were very liberating, because I began to believe that I could do -- we could do; that was more important, we could do.

WARITH DEEN MUHAMMAD: I suspected religion Nation of Islam style, wanted to assist us and prod us along: Go to your destiny. Hurry up. Go to your destiny. Your destiny where you’ll see your true human value better, and you’ll respect yourself more. I saw the Nation of Islam as that influence, prodding us on and whispering to us: You don’t have it yet, quite right.

NARRATOR: As an adolescent, Wallace Muhammad had begun a spiritual journey that would continue for the rest of his life.

WARITH DEEN MOHAMMED: When I was about 13 years old, I was left at home. And this is a wood frame house. And when everybody gets out of it, .. [and nothing happening], it starts talking, you know. The floors are squeaking, and strange noises, and I’m scared. So I held my hands the way we hold them when we would pray, like this. We called it prayer, but really it’s Du’a. It means calling on God for something,..for some help, some assistance. So I held my hands like this, and I hesitated to-- I didn’t speak right away. I hesitated like this. I’m holding my hands like this. Then I said, “Oh Allah, if I’m not seeing you correctly, will you please help me see you correctly?” And what was bothering me wasn’t that I disliked anything, but the logic was bothering me. I’m told that white people are devils. I guess from the time I took the first drink of milk, [laughs] I’m told that white people are devils, you know. And the man I’m seeing, his picture-- I’m seeing the picture of the teacher who taught my father and gave my father his mission. His name is Fard. So I’m giving--seeing the picture of our Savior (we called him), our Savior. And I’m not comfortable with that picture because I was told the white man’s the devil.

NARRATOR: By the time he was 25 Wallace Muhammad had become minister of temple #11 in Philadelphia, and a lieutenant in the Fruit of Islam. He was a friend of Malcolm X, but while Malcolm X remained a true believer in Elijah

Muhammad, Wallace Muhammad harbored doubts about the message and the messenger.

WARITH DEEN MOHAMMED: I was raised to believe in the teachings of my father, and identified my religion as Islam. But as I grew older, as I got braver, I guess, to face things that were not settling with me too well, ideas about the origin of man, and God, it took me from the Nation of Islam's teachings. And I was changing the way I thought and the way I perceived reality.

NARRATOR: As a young minister, Wallace Muhammad brought his growing knowledge of Orthodox Islam to the temple in Philadelphia.

SHAKIR MAHMOUD: He was teaching his people, the membership of Philadelphia, more knowledge of Prophet Muhammad, more knowledge of the Holy Qur'an, its value, de-emphasizing his father's role—subtly, you know. He didn't— you know. He didn't emphasize his father as Prophet Mohammed. He talked to them about the late Prophet Mohammed. And he taught Arabic. He showed them how to pray. And so therefore his temple was uniquely advanced.

HASAN SHARIF: He was just persistent in unraveling the mysteries of Fard's teachings and-and searching for something to hold on, other than those questions that kept popping up in his mind, I guess, .. regarding the concept of God in the Nation of Islam.

NARRATOR: Elijah Muhammad forbid all members of the Nation of Islam from serving in the U. S. military, which he called the white man's army. Wallace Muhammad was charged with draft evasion and in 1961 began serving a three-year prison sentence.

WARITH DEEN MOHAMMED: I was in [Sandstone] Federal Correctional Institution, free, away from family, away from the Temple of Islam, demands on my time. I'm free.

NARRATOR: Freed from the contradictions of the Nation's faith, Wallace Muhammad was left alone to face himself.

WARITH DEEN MOHAMMED: Well, certain ideas that would be— come under theology, had become so unattractive to me, I had to throw it out. You have a nice garment. You really like this garment. And it's—it's .. a strong sentimental attachment to it, you know. But it's getting old. It's got holes. Everybody's seeing the holes. So you're not going out there. You say, "I'm not going out anymore with this on. I have to throw this away. Much as I like it, I have to throw it away." And the most difficult thing was to say the Honorable Elijah Muhammad is not the messenger of God, or the messenger of Allah. That was very difficult. But I had to say that.

WARITH DEEN MOHAMMED: Now, I'm not only having difficulty saying my father's no more this high figure here, in religion, and bringing him down to a low level with preachers and reformers rather than as a Messenger of God. But I'm having difficulty too, rejecting what they told me I—about myself: that you were chosen before you were born. So now, that's a high place for me too, that I'm chosen before I was born, and I'm supposed to be one of three doing this great work: God in the person or in the flesh, Elijah Muhammad the messenger of God, and me!

JAMES H. CONE: The spiritual and the political are intimately related, but the spiritual is the foundation for everything. So I know what I am, because of my spiritual connection with a power much greater than myself. Now that's the spiritual side, when you experience that spiritual power and affirmation it pushes you to bring the political in harmony with the spiritual knowledge that you have of yourself.

NARRATOR: For black Christians and others who believed in freedom faith, the 1963 March on Washington became the very expression of spiritual power and political affirmation. That same year, Wallace was released from prison. He began to share his spiritual awakening, a path that would lead him into direct conflict with his father.

HASAN SHARIF: Listening to Uncle Wallace's just basic things, you know: How can a man be God? God created the heavens and the earth, and created the people and everything. How can we— How can we pray to a human being? Those kind of— Those kind of things. I mean, they're so basic, so fundamental, but I mean,.. they were eye-opening things to me

SHAKIR MAHMOUD: I knew that I had to somewhat de-program myself and de-orientate myself. And how I began to start to do that was, I just emerged myself into Islamic information. And by me submerging myself into study, it began to contrast the lack of information that I had about what Islam was or was not.

NARRATOR: The NOI was under siege. The mainstream media portrayed them as fanatics. The FBI had targeted them for investigation. That only made their faith in Elijah Muhammad stronger

NARRATOR: But when Muhammad was charged with fathering seven children out of wedlock, the community of believers was shaken.

LOUIS FARRAKHAN: This is the black man we have waited for...this is the black man we have prayed for...

NARRATOR: Louis X, minister of Temple #9 in Boston, was among Elijah Muhammad's strongest defenders.

LOUIS FARRAKHAN: ...our prayers have been answered...his name...all praises due to Allah.

NARRATOR: Although Wallace Muhammad stood beside his father, reports of his heresy led to his being excommunicated several times

WARITH DEEN MOHAMMED: The first time that I was excommunicated or put out of the Nation of Islam, what brought that about was reports to my father, the leader of the Nation of Islam, Honorable Elijah Muhammad, that I was saying that Mr. Fard is not God.

HASAN SHARIF: We felt that what we believed, what we had embraced, was right, was right universally. And we felt that what they believed, or what we formerly believed, was wrong, and that it was destined to go down or to fade or to go away at some point. That truth is forever.

NARRATOR: Malcolm X, the man who had been like a son to Elijah Muhammad and Wallace, the man who was his son left the Nation. They moved in different directions towards Orthodox Islam. They were labeled traitors.

WALLACE MUHAMMAD: We received some threats from the Chicago staff here. And we were told that there were members of the New York mosque who were also planning to come to Chicago to do us bodily harm.

WARITH DEEN MOHAMMED: One time I was coming home too, and it was about 12 o'clock, and I'm getting ready to cross the street. And I notice a suspicious looking car. And I could see two figures on the front seat, and the lights are out on the car. And I'm thinking that they are members of the Fruit of Islam. I'm thinking and I believe that. When I got out about-about in the middle of the street, they put the bright lights on, the headlights on, high beams on, gunned the motor coming toward me. And my mind told me: Keep your same pace. Don't change. When he got close to me, he swerved around me to miss me, and when I looked to see the lights (I was trying to catch the license plate), they had turned the lights out. And they turned the corner, immediately turned-turned the corner.

NARRATOR: In February 1965, Malcolm X was assassinated in Harlem.

NARRATOR: Within days, Malcolm X's followers burned the Nation's Temple #7 in New York. As factions arose in the Nation, the community Elijah Muhammad had worked so hard to build seemed threatened from within and without.

WARITH DEEN MOHAMMED: I heard on the radio that Malcolm had been killed. Without thinking, I told my wife. I said, "I have to call Daddy." He came to the phone. He said, "As sala'amu alaikum, Wallace." I said, "Walaikum as sala'am, Daddy." I said, "Tomorrow is Savior's Day." I said, "I want to be on the platform

with you tomorrow at your— at your Savior’s Day.” He said, “That’s good, son.” Said, “Well, you know what that means.” I said, “Yes, sir.” He said, “You’ll have to come before the people and tell them you were wrong.” I said, “Yes, sir.” Hung up

SPEAKER: “I’m going to bring before you, the Messenger of Allah’s son, Brother Wallace D. Muhammad, who wants to make a confession. Brother Wallace D. Muhammad.”

WARITH DEEN MOHAMMED: And I said to them, “As sala’amu alaikum.” They returned the greetings to me, very warm and powerful return of the greetings to me. Spirit of Savior’s Day. And I said to them... (Wallace Muhammad speaking in archival.)

WALLACE MUHAMMAD: Brothers and sisters, I regret my mistakes and I pray Allah that my father accept me, and I pray as is necessary that you also accept me; and permit me back in your midst as a brother. As sala’amu alaikum.”

WARITH DEEN MOHAMMED: Well, the Nation of Islam was precious to us, as ... a means of getting us— moving us from the old Negro or the old black man to the new black man. So to save the child for the future was what I had on my mind. And to defeat whatever the enemies of the Nation of Islam were doing to divide the leadership and disillusion the following. That’s all I was responding to. I was— I was responding to the Nation of Islam at risk. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad needs help in this serious time. That’s what I was responding to.

SHAKIR MAHMOUD: My reaction to Wallace going back was a little disappointing at that time. But I had to— That was an emotional response. I think, through my rationality and reason, I realized that, you know, he-he owed more— he had obligations to his family. He had obligations to his father. He has obligations to the people that were followed by his father.

NARRATOR: In 1975 Elijah Muhammad died. He was 77. He had publicly refused to name a successor. Although many within the leadership sought the position, the inner circle knew that Muhammad favored his son Wallace.

NI’MAT ABDUS SAMAD: And I remember that at the moment it was announced that he -- Wallace was going to be the successor to his father and the leader. The people in the auditorium just went -- just berserk over (laughter) -- berserk in a -- you know, a mannerly way, if you will, but I mean, everybody just -- it was just -- it was just joyous; it was exciting.

NARRATOR: W.D. Fard’s prophecy of Wallace Muhammad’s leadership had been fulfilled. But Wallace Muhammad had his own agenda. Almost immediately he began moving the community towards orthodox Islam.

WARITH DEEN MOHAMMED: How did I— how I brought about the change or transformation? It was finding first something from those people that they respected, those high figures that they respected: Mr. Fard and the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. I-I got whatever they had given me to do the job with. I took that first. And then I added to that, I built upon that. And that's how it was done. I-I didn't come to them and telling them that this is a lie. No, that wouldn't work. They'd throw me out of there. [laughs] And I wouldn't blame them.

HASAN SHARIF: He established that the basis for the Muslim life for this community was Koran, the-the revealed word of God, and that we-we stand on that, we follow that, and that the sunna, the sunna, the life example of the Prophet Mohammed (the prayers and the peace be upon the prophet) is our example.

NARRATOR: Wallace Muhammad renamed himself Warith Deen Mohammed, "inheritor of the faith." He took the title of Imam. He streamlined the many businesses owned by the Nation and he abolished the Fruit of Islam. Most disturbingly to the old guard, he extended membership to white people.

JOHN BILAL: It was like going from heaven to hell in one night. My whole world was turned upside down. As a student of the University of Islam, we didn't have the best books, we didn't have the best facilities but the spirit was indescribable. When that resolved as a result of the death of the Hon. Elijah Muhammad and the advent of his son. It through my world into ahh ...into trouble. And it finally came to me that those disciplines that I was a part of were what was giving me that. It was— It was what was supporting me. So I up and joined the Marine Corps.

DON MUHAMMAD: I remained in the Nation of Islam when Wallace Deen Muhammad took over initially. I was there for about a year. And initially I thought that the changes that he was going to bring would be beneficial. As I've said before, we're not perfect, and we're always striving to improve. But there was one night in particular that Imam Wallace Deen Muhammad said that his father was not divine, that he in fact did not believe that his father was the messenger of God. I could not take that. That would be going against what I believed.

NARRATOR: By 1976, the original Nation of Islam ceased to exist. Two years later, Minister Louis Farrakhan resurrected it. Farrakhan, still believed in the philosophy of the Nation and the divinity of Elijah Muhammad.

DON MUHAMMAD: We don't believe that the Honorable Elijah Muhammad died. We don't believe that. Those of us who really believe in him, we believe that he

is away from us, and we do believe that he's going to return to us. The Nation of Islam under the leadership of Minister Louis Farrakhan is about first loving one another, loving each other, and then loving everybody else.

JOHN BILAL: Well, the reason that I didn't follow Minister Farrakhan was because I was becoming familiar with Al-Islam as it was being taught to me by W.D. Muhammad. And what Minister Farrakhan was bringing, I had already experienced that.

NARRATOR: Between 1975 and 2001, Warith Deen Mohammed brought two million African Americans into Islam. He immersed his community in traditional practices. They make the pilgrimage to Mecca, called hajj and pray five times a day.

NI'MAT ABDUS SAMAD: I don't think I thought very much about the man until he said three words that opened the door for me: And those three words were, "Man is mind." And a door opened for me that has never closed.

NI'MAT ABDUS SAMAD: "Man is mind," means that, this is where you are. This doesn't -- this is not what matters; it's what's here and what's here in the heart and in the mind.

NARRATOR: Imam Warith Deen Mohammed named his organization the Muslim American Society. It connects African American Muslims with Islamic communities worldwide. Today, Islam is one of the fastest growing religions among African Americans.

NI'MAT ABDUS SAMAD: The Muslim I am today is one who is, um, firm in the belief, strong in my practice. Um, in the Nation of Islam, I would barely even touch the Koran. Today, by the grace of Allah, his mercy, his blessing, I not only touch it; I am in it.

NARRATOR: No matter what their spiritual journey the river of faith allows African Americans to wade through the changing currents of their daily lives.

BARBARA BARRETT: For anyone, there're two very key things. And that's faith and that's submission. And submission, to me, is not a weak thing. It's a strong thing, because it's very difficult for you to submit and do what you have to do, in light of all the comments and in light of all the things that are going to start happening. We call them [Ajagun], negative spirits. Somebody else may call them the devil. But either way... all that stuff's going to [bum-rush] you at once and try to make you give up. And it just can't happen. You have to have faith, and you have to submit.

NARRATOR: Embracing the faith of the ancestors has become essential for many African Americans as they search for a connection to the divine.

RACHEL HARDING: It's almost as if it's—it's really— it's not an option for-for-for people whose essential humanity has-has so often been denied, than the search for the way to affirm humanity, whether that's in religion or in art or in family or in culture, it's—it's—it's a necessary and required and sustaining search.

JAMES H. CONE: We have to write our own confessions of faith, we have to write our own doctrine, we have to write our own creeds, only then can we come up with a distinctive faith.. and hopefully we will meet together, and we will put all these expressions of faith together, then we will get a sense of the what the universality of the faith will be.