

The Role of FBI Counterintelligence Program in Disrupting Activism of the Nation of Islam and other African-American Political Movements in the USA

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Abstract:

In this article we sought to examine the interference of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in African Americans' activism for justice, equality and a racism-free society in the USA. We found out that the FBI interfered in this activism since the early 20th century by surveilling their political activities, infiltrating agents to spy on their leaders, creating tension among them, using the mass media to distort their image, using justice to imprison them by finding excuses to imprison leaders and followers, breaking their political parties and even inciting some leaders to commit suicide or assassinating them. This happened with the Moorish Science Temple of America, UNIA, NOI and all other black movements. We used historical as well as declassified FBI files analysis to reach these results. The research is important for researchers interested in the subject of the NOI mainly and African American activism in general.

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Introduction

Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO) suggests a program devised by the government to counter and deter foreign intelligence in the USA for national security. Yet, when examined closely, it becomes clear that this program was intended to essentially infiltrate African - American movements by FBI undercover agents to spy on the leaders and other prominent activists, expose their immoral acts if any to the public, disband their movements, parties, and in some instances` incite them to commit suicide and even assassinate them (Bazian, 2012). They were targeted because they fought against segregation and structural racism in society and government structures. Not only FBI, but CIA and National Security Agency (NSA) had similar intelligence programs ordered by the Justice Department (for the FBI). All these spying programs were illegal as they violated the First Amendment of the US Constitution. The freedom of speech and assembly are constitutionally guaranteed, but the Federal Government disrespected them as racism increased mainly against American citizens of African descent, and against Muslims in general principally after 9/11 events. We chose this topic because few researches studied the problem of infiltration and how FBI stifled black activism and the attainment of civil rights. Therefore, the significance of this article stems from this rarity of studies. The article pivots basically upon the analysis of declassified FBI files. A historical survey of FBI spying and secret interference in African-American political movements since early 20th century decades has been provided to furnish a clear view of its development throughout the century.

1.FBI Infiltration and Toppling of Marcus Garvey

We begin here with FBI intelligence over the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA)¹, an African-American organization dedicated to racial pride, economic self-sufficiency, and the formation of an independent black nation in Africa (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2023). It was founded by Marcus Garvey² in Jamaica in 1914, but it activated for African- Americans' rights mainly in ghettos in the USA. It was one of the earliest FBI intelligence operations over US citizens of African descent. Contemporary to the UNIA there activated for black rights in the USA African-American W.E.B DuBois, a philosopher and journalist. Yet, the latter was not happy with Garvey's kind of activism. He criticized him and his movement so often (M'Bayo, 2004).

While W.E.B. DuBois³ took lightly and ironically the claim of Marcus Garvey that gigantic conspiracies had been woven against him to discredit him and undermine his movement of the UNIA, this was, however, true to a certain extent. When Garvey said that his arrest on the charge of using the US mails to defraud was but a concoction by unseen forces to find some criminal excuse to scorn and ridicule the leader of the UNIA worldwide, he was right. Recently, it has become known that FBI agents, under Hoover and Burns, played the role of the unseen forces in concocting to destroy Garvey, the Black Moses as he was called by his followers (Hansford, 2008).

By the fall of 1919, the FBI started the surveillance program of black Americans. It recruited black informants and infiltrated them in all the Negro lodges and associations to report on ministers and anyone who preached social equality and equal rights. The informants hoped to detect ultra-radical activities and even liberal activities among blacks and forward reports about them to the Justice Department's General Intelligence Division (GID) headed by John Edgar Hoover, then twenty-four. The latter came to believe that "the Reds have done a vast amount of evil damage by carrying doctrines of race revolt and the poison of Bolshevism to the Negroes" (Marsh, 2000, p.67). He concluded that the Negroes were "seeing Red" and that the race riots of whites against blacks that led to the murdering of a number of blacks were caused by "the numerous assaults committed by Negroes upon white women" (Marsh, 2000, p.68).

Most of the investigations of the Negro Question as termed by the FBI targeted Marcus Garvey and his movement. Thinking that he was “the foremost radical among his race,” (Marsh, 2000, p.67). Hoover was determined “once and for all to put him where he can peruse his past activities behind the four walls of the Atlanta clime” (Marsh, 2000, p.68), that is to jail him. In search of a suitable crime to get him, Hoover hired four black agents and assigned one of them, James W. Jones (undercover agent 800) to infiltrate the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and keep by Garvey's sides in Harlem. The UNIA (1914 – 1929) was an international association established by Garvey to stress black pride, strengthen racial unity of African Americans, and redeem Africa from white rule (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023). The GID attempted to find any crime for him and endeavoured to prove he was a British and Canadian agent. It also tried to pursue him for white slavery, that is transporting a woman across state line for immoral purposes. These attempts failed. Finally, in 1923, Hoover secured a charge of using the mails to defraud while raising money for his maritime company and cheating “many old Negroes” out of their hard-earned money, as William J. Burns then FBI director claimed (Hansford, 2008). But the Government's case was weak and the Federal authorities did not prosecute.

Meanwhile, the hostility of the black race leaders was at its peak after the murder of an early admirer of Garvey, James W.H. Eason, who split with the movement and was rumoured to have decided to be a key prosecution witness in the mail-fraud case. Although his murder was proved to have no connection with the UNIA, the black leadership constituted a Committee of Eight and sent an open letter to the U.S. Attorney General to condemn Garveyism which sought to arouse ill-feeling between the races. They further urged him to disband and extirpate the vicious movement, and to speedily push the case against Garvey for the mail defraud (Hansford, 2008).

Garvey responded by denouncing the “good old darkies” bitterly and accused them of currying the white man's favour treacherously at the expense of their people, whose only crime was to seek to improve their condition. In May, he was tried and convicted of the crime and was fined and sentenced to jail for a term of five years. He remained in liberty for seventeen months during which time his lawyers made unsuccessful appeals. In February 1925, he was imprisoned at the Federal Penitentiary at Atlanta, Georgia. There, he served nearly two years until President Calvin Coolidge pardoned him in 1927, because Garvey had played a role in securing him a considerable mass of black votes. The President also ordered his deportation as an undesirable alien (SoRelle, 1974). This was because Garvey was not a US citizen and had committed a felony, thus, the law stipulated that he was to deport to his country of origin.

The FBI, which was part of the conspiracy against the UNIA and its leader, did not attack him because Hoover considered him a communist or a White Slaver or a British or Canadian agent, nor even that he used the US mails to defraud. The cause was Garvey's “pro-negroism,” and his “doctrine of the Negro for the Negro.” As William J. Burns, the FBI director said that Garvey was, “the most prominent Negro agitator in the world today and we have been ‘on’ him” (O' Reilly, 1989, pp. 12 – 13). It was because he rejected the integrationist ideas of the “conservative element,” that the FBI destroyed “the Negro Moses” according to the same author.

When he returned to Jamaica, he did not stay there for long. He turned his energies to internal issues in an attempt to improve the condition of the black workers in Jamaica. He campaigned on a platform of self-government and minimum wage laws, and land and judicial reform. Later, he participated in the elections, but received a sound defeat due to his followers' lack of voting qualifications. Then, he went to London in 1935, and from there he worked hard to revive his movement in the USA (SoRelle, 1974). However, his wish did not materialize and his movement collapsed. It never again had the strength like that of 1925. He was then ignored by the American

press that when he died in a cottage in West Kensington, England, on June 10, 1940, his death was scarcely noticed in the American press.

2.COINTELPRO and the Nation of Islam

In the 1970s, the Nation of Islam under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad continued to prosper despite the conflict among his family, the defections following the murder of *El Hajj* Malik Shabazz (former Malcolm X), and the ailing leader. The membership increased to reach approximately one million. The Nation of Islam (NOI)⁴ also acquired 15,000 acres of farmland, thousands of heads of cattle and sheep, poultry and dairy farms, warehouses and cold storage facilities, hundreds of tractors, planes, the Guaranty Bank and Trust Company, apartments, wholesale, and retail businesses. Besides, it established seventy- six mosques in the USA and abroad in Bermuda, Jamaica, Trinidad, Central America, England, Ghana, and the US Virgin Islands. According to Marsh (2000) the NOI estimation, its businesses enterprises were valued at \$85 million by the late 1970s. The members were leading a better life than the former Black Muslims as they were called by FBI agents since the beginning of the Nation up to the late 1950s. Nevertheless, this stability and material prosperity was not to last for long. Change and transformation and conflict and rift were waiting, and the FBI was working undercover to undermine this organization and render it a purely religious one, away from stirring blacks and causing unrest and disorder to the government (Gardell, 1996). In the subsection below, the undercover activities of the FBI and the Bureau of Special Services and Investigations (BOSSI) will be examined.

3.Beginning of Spying on the Nation of Islam

Activities of the Nation of Islam (NOI) came early to the attention of the FBI and the police when a follower of W. D. Fard, the founder of this movement, killed his roommate in a ritual sacrifice in Detroit, Michigan, in 1935 (Beynon, 1938). This incident set the FBI agents on the Black Muslims ever since. The Black Muslims were more targeted by the FBI undercover activities than any other single group in the late 1930s. The Security Index of this agency reflects clearly this interest. It contains a list of prominent dissidents to the US government since 1939 and it is topped by 673 members of the NOI followed by communists numbering 476. In fact, the history of the Bureau of Investigation, as it was called in the beginning, became linked from the time of its founding in 1908 with the history of the blacks in America. The word "Federal" was not added until 1935. The Bureau received directives from the White House and the Justice Department to avoid protecting the civil rights, and was at the same time ordered to start spying on blacks. After a series of attacks on blacks, the Department of Justice announced that it had "no authority... to protect citizens of African descent in the enjoyment of civil rights generally" (Oreilly, 1989, p. 9).

A long time after its establishment when J. Edgar Hoover was associated with the Bureau in 1919, the Department of Justice cited wartime security needs to justify the violation of the blacks' civil liberties, infiltrated their movements, and spied on their activities, leading, thus, to their intimidation. In fact, even before Hoover, Bureau agents visited black neighbourhoods earlier in 1917, immediately after the Congress made the war declaration on Germany. Their mission was to assess the black attitude towards the draft and to investigate the possibility of subversion against the government. Rumours reached the Bureau that German agents were organizing an army of Mexicans and blacks to fight a rear-war against the USA to win back the territories which the United States had taken from Mexico in the Mexican-American war.⁵ The FBI believed that traitors, spies, and saboteurs had provoked the race riots in a score of cities in 1917 as well as the Red Summer of 1919.⁶ Another reason that dictated the FBI behaviour vis-à-vis the blacks was its

belief that second-class citizens would have only second-class loyalty and dismissed all black citizens as subversive (Oreilly, 1989). No black dissident was allowed to challenge his second-class citizenship. Hoover proposed repression of such dissidents under the cover of law and order. Subversion meant to him race riots, miscegenation, and any black political activity. He came to equate “the Negro question,” as the Bureau called it, with subversion. This was the attitude of this institution towards blacks, an unfriendly one.

Thus, by the mid-thirties when a follower of Elijah Muhammad plunged a knife into the heart of another follower in their room so that the victim would become a “savior of humanity”, as reported by Beynon, (1938) the FBI started gathering intelligence on the movement. This was apparently for the objective of preventing the repetition of such a dramatic incident. However, recent studies and FBI secret files revealed that the Bureau also gathered intelligence on the political activities of the NOI (Gardell, 1996).

The FBI agents were trying to discover communist propaganda activities among black movements, but this proved negative. Another thing that the government feared was the influence of the Japanese propaganda against the US among the blacks. This was not without reason. In the 1930s, a Japanese agent by the name of Major Satakata Takahashi (FBI, 1975) established the Black Dragon Society in order to win sympathy for the Japanese cause among blacks. He won a little degree of sympathy among Black Muslims (members of the Nation of Islam), who started to wish that the Japanese would come and defeat the US army. The contacts which he developed with the NOI during the leadership of W.D. Fard came to an end when he asked the Black Muslims to swear allegiance to the Japanese government (FBI, 1975). Whatever contacts with him were limited and Takahashi ended by being expelled from the USA. Rightly, Takahashi made an attempt to exploit the disillusionment and disenchantment of blacks towards their government.

Later during the Second World War, the FBI spied on Black Muslims to see if there were any antidraft propaganda. Effectively, a number of adherents refused the draft in the US army, because they believed “*Allah*” taught them they were neutral citizens registered in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, and consequently, they had no stake in the war (Haley, 1964). They viewed it as a white man’s war in which the blacks had no interest. They believed that “*Allah*” had taught them not to fight people who did not fight them, which was the case of the Germans and the Japanese. Elijah Muhammad himself failed to register and was tried and sentenced to five years’ imprisonment, which he served from 1942 to 1946 in the Federal Correction Institution at Milan, Michigan. His son, Emmanuel Karriem, was sentenced to five years. After the Second World War, FBI intelligence on the NOI slackened until about 1957 when this agency resumed its spying activities on the NOI. That year, a thorough investigation of the W. D. Fard’s unresolved identity question had begun. To begin with, the agents interviewed his supposedly former common-law wife, Hazel Barton, as well as the wife of Erdmann Beynon who had made the first scientific investigation on the NOI in 1937. Nonetheless, after years of investigation, the agents found nothing as to his identity and his mysterious disappearance (FBI, 1967).

The most intensive FBI activities took place in the 1960s, when it became convinced that the NOI was a hate group which might eventually become violent and harmful to the US communities. Before that, in the late 1950s, J. Edgar Hoover’s interest in Elijah Muhammad’s movement was the result of what he termed “their violently anti-white rhetoric” and their verbal support for the Mau Mau⁷ and the Viet Minh⁸ in Northern Vietnam. This federal agency sought to get the NOI on the list of subversive organizations in the Department of Justice, and to incite the latter to imprison the leaders for conspiring to violate the Smith Act and the Selective Service Act⁹. Gardell (1996) reported that on December 31, 1956, J. Edgar Hoover requested authorization from

Attorney General Herbert Brownel to install technical surveillance on the residence of Elijah Muhammad.

He explained his motives by stating that the followers of Elijah Muhammad were taught not to follow the laws of the USA, and that certain allegations had been received that they might resort to violence to carry out their avowed goal of destroying non-Muslims and Christianity. The Department of Justice, however, refused this matter and accepted only to wiretap Elijah Muhammad's home telephone in Chicago and his winter residence in Phoenix, Atlanta. Subsequently, on January 4, 1957, taps were installed at his house in Chicago (Gardell, 1996). Later, more technical surveillance and microphones were installed in his homes. Added to this, the FBI placed informants in strategic positions, which provided this agency with excellent information on the NOI activities, membership, policies, business, and other programs. The Bureau used these data to organize its counterintelligence over a long period (O'Reilly, 1989).

In fact, the NOI was not the only movement targeted by the FBI to spy, monitor, and render ineffective. Several other civil rights groups were subject to the COMINFIL (communist infiltration) and COINTELPRO (counterintelligence program) to purge communist party members and others from "legitimate mass organizations." The Bureau executed its "COINTELPRO" to counter the NOI, the black civil rights movement and other organizations in achieving their goals. The "COINTELPRO" was the FBI secret program to undermine the popular upsurge of the Civil Rights movements and others that swept the country during the 1960s (American Friends Service Committee, 1979).

Although the name "counterintelligence program" meant fighting foreign enemy spies, in reality, it was directed against what the FBI termed radical political opposition inside the USA. At first, the Bureau used traditional modes of repression such as exposure, blatant harassment, and prosecution for political crimes. When these failed to counter the growing insurgency of black protesters for the obtaining of the civil rights, it ignored the law and secretly used force and fraud to sabotage the civil rights constitutional political activities. The methods used for their program ranged from surveillance and amounted to criminal actions like the infamous ones committed by the CIA abroad (Gardell, 1996). The FBI ordered its field offices to devise schemes to misdirect, discredit, disrupt, and otherwise neutralize specific individuals and groups. It set close local coordination between local police and prosecutors. It approved two thousand individual operations, which could be sorted into three types of methods:

- **Infiltration:** The mission of the Bureau's agents and informers was not confined to spying, but extended to discredit the leaders of the organizations and disrupt their activities.
- **Other forms of deception:** The agents and the police led a psychological war from outside by disseminating bogus publications, forging correspondence, anonymous letters, and telephone calls, etc.
- **Harassment and other methods:** Intimidation, violence, eviction, job loss, break-ins, vandalism, grand jury subpoenas, false arrests, frame-ups, and physical violence were threatened, instigated, or directly employed to frighten activists and disrupt their movements (Marsh, 2000).

These FBI undercover activities were directed against all popular movements in the USA during the 1960s, the era that witnessed a great number of them (Bazian, 2012). Nonetheless, COINTELPRO was most intensely directed against black movements from the most moderate ones like the NAACP to the most radical like the Black Panther Party¹⁰. The cause of this attitude could be found in the racism of the police, FBI agents, and the lack of blacks' material resources to fight back, along with the tendency of the media and the whites in general to ignore attacks on blacks.

The other cause was what the blacks represented for the government. They were highly militant and possessed a large domestic base and international support. Their long-time suffering and militant experience developed in them the ability to galvanize the whole of the popular upsurge of the 1960s like communist agitation, the counterculture of the youths who challenged the mainstream culture and traditions (O'Reilly, 1988). Yet, not only communist and extremist black agitators were on the list of the FBI. The list of wanted people to neutralize extended to include even the pacifist activists like Martin Luther King, Jr., David Dellinger,¹¹ and Philip Berrigan.¹²

For example, the agents worked to get King to commit suicide. The Bureau spent years in practising surveillance on the nightly activities of King by watching him, breaking into hotel rooms to install microphones in the hope of discovering damaging information on his sexual behaviour. After recording long segments of his sexual acts, which Hoover described as "obsessive degenerate sexual urges," (Gardell, 1996, p. 75) they attempted to use them to expose King and neutralize him as a spokesman for the black civil rights. This culminated when William C. Sullivan, an officer from the FBI, mailed a tape on which segments of King's sexual acts were recorded to the latter and accompanied it with a letter in which he incited him to suicide. Gardell (1996) cites that Sullivan wrote, "You better take it before your filthy, abnormal self is bared to the nation" (p. 75). This was, however, a failure as Coretta King, his wife, opened the envelope and played the tape to discover a plot against her husband. Then she called him by phone and he came with some of his assistants and listened to the tape. The plot was disclosed. This failed to bring King to suicide or to break his marriage.

4. Targeting Malcolm X

As to the adherents of the Nation of Islam (NOI) or former ones who eventually became dissenters, Malcolm X was an important target of the FBI. The Bureau was aware of his threat because of his position as a national and international figure. His growing influence as an able, respectable, and visionary spokesman against the Vietnam War, colonialism, apartheid, and being an advocate of world peace created the Bureau's desire to get rid of him and, therefore, decapitate the black movements. He also meant to bring the case of African Americans to the United Nations to get an indictment of the United States because of its violation of the African American human rights. After his visit to Africa and the Middle East, which was monitored by the CIA in all its details, he got the support of Ghana, Saudi Arabia, and President Ben Bella (Algeria), among others (Evanzz, 1998). In a debate with his friend, the writer Louis E. Lomax, on May 23, 1964, he said, "We cannot expect help from our brothers in Africa as long as civil rights is an issue. I propose we lift the issue of civil rights to the level of human rights by bringing it before the United Nations" (Evanzz, 1998, p.87).

This was one of the principal causes that called for his elimination. In addition, they saw it a necessity to prevent the "rise of a black Messiah" among blacks in the USA. Malcolm X was assassinated by three Black Muslims who hated him. Talmadge Hayer, the main hit man, confessed his assassination and claimed during the trial proceedings, that he was promised several thousands of dollars from a non-Muslim to murder Malcolm X (Haley, 1964).

In 1977, Hayer confessed to Nuriddin Faiz, a Muslim prison *Imam*, that he had lied in his first declarations, and that Johnson and Butler were innocent. Besides, he gave the names of four Black Muslims living in New Jersey, who had participated in the murder. Defense Attorney William Kunstler took the information from Nuriddin Faiz, including addresses, detailed descriptions, and occupations of the claimed accomplices. He attempted to reopen the case, but in 1978 Judge Harold Ratham refused the trial, ruling that Hayer's testimony was not enough evidence to reopen the case. Kunstler pleaded the District Attorney of New York, but the latter

rejected his request as well. He then petitioned the House of Representatives in 1979 via the Congressional Black Caucus. Attorney Kunstler believed that the FBI and the New York City police played a supporting role in Malcolm's death (Marsh, 2000). The question here is: Who benefited from the elimination of Malcolm X? Was the motive only the hate which certain followers of Elijah Muhammad¹³ nourished against him as a result of his departure from the NOI and his bitter criticism of his former mentor and "father?" From memos to top FBI officials, it has been revealed that the FBI and the New York Police Department's super-secret elite undercover unit, BOSSI hated Malcolm X and waged a fierce secret campaign to undermine him and with him the Black Muslims (Marsh, 2000). They riddled the Nation of Islam and Malcolm's OAAU (Organization of Afro-American Unity) with informants and police agents. They reported on all his speeches and private talks and dogged his tail when he traveled to Africa and the Middle East (Muhammad, 2022b).

The FBI was well informed about the death threats against Malcolm X coming from the Nation of Islam (Carson, 2012). During a European tour, the respective authorities of Britain and France did not allow him to leave the airports of London and Paris for fear that he would be assassinated in their lands (Breitman, 1969, p.158). Malcolm himself knew that his life was threatened and that the FBI and the local police had taken a see-no-evil, hear-no-evil attitude towards the threats he had been subject to. He wrote a letter of protest to the then Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, and said in it, "The government had no intention to help or protect my life" (Marsh, 2000, p.71). He then told friends and reporters that there were forces bigger than the Muslims that wanted to kill him.

His bodyguards, who seemed to protect him on the day of his assassination, included undercover FBI agents (Muhammad, 2022b). The most famous picture of Malcolm's assassination was the one published by *Life* magazine which showed his bodyguard, Gene Roberts, administering him artificial resuscitation. This operation was medically contraindicated in the case of a wounded chest, like that of Malcolm X that was full of wounds caused by bullets. It would cause air bubbles that provoke a cardiac arrest and death. Gene Roberts-it was later revealed-was an undercover agent for BOSSI (Muhammad, 2022a).

Although there is no evidence that the FBI or the New York police had a direct hand in the murder of Malcolm X, it could not be separated from the fierce war waged by the FBI against him or any other "Black Messiah" in the 1960s. It is known that before his murder, he had worked out a constructive program for domestic social and economic change, and had developed from a race-baiting demagogue to a leading social critic after his leaving the NOI. This was not to be tolerated, for he was someone who caused unrest among the black community in America (Muhammad, 2022a).

5. FBI Capitalization on NOI and Malcolm X's Rift

Gardell (p.78) wrote that the FBI discovered a tension growing between Malcolm X and some top ministers among the leadership and Elijah Muhammad as a result of Malcolm's fame as a national representative of the NOI. The Bureau capitalized on this tension and developed it to destroy either the movement or Malcolm X (Sabin, 2018). In 1960, this federal agency obtained information through its informants and the technical surveillance that Elijah Muhammad had engaged in extramarital affairs with eight of his secretaries. Four of them became pregnant: Sisters Evelyn, Rosary, Rosella, and Lavita. The golden opportunity offered itself to the FBI to expose Elijah Muhammad, damage his reputation, break his marriage, and disrupt his organization. To execute this plan, the Bureau mailed unmarked letters written on commercial stationery to Clara

Muhammad, his wife, Wallace Deen Muhammad, Malcolm X, and other top ministers in the NOI. The letters were, of course, anonymous. This plan was almost without effect on the movement. Clara Muhammad started to hate some secretaries but remained faithful to her husband until her death in 1972 (Marsh, 2000).

The followers seemed not to care about the extra-marital sexual life of their “Messenger,” whom they believed was divinely inspired and commissioned. The FBI did not believe the result. Its officers forgot that the followers came from black ghettos, where morals were not necessarily the same as those of white, middle-class America. In the black ghetto, men boasted of being lady-killers to prove their masculinity.

Failing to destroy Elijah Muhammad, the FBI decided to use these data to further the tension between Malcolm X and his leader. Malcolm expressed his shock over learning that the “Messenger” was a betrayer, an adulterer, and a dupe. What really caused Malcolm’s mental turmoil was that he had recommended two former girlfriends to Elijah Muhammad, Sisters Evelyn and Lucille who became pregnant (Marable, 2011). What hurt Malcolm most of all was the discovery that Sister Evelyn, whom he planned once to marry and recommended to the “Messenger” as secretary had been disrespected and himself betrayed. Malcolm had the courage to confront his mentor with the news which the latter did not deny, but made the pretext that he was like prophets Lot, who lay with his own daughters and David who took the wife of another one. This is not true in Islam; no prophet committed adultery (Marable, 2011). Probably, the FBI knew about Malcolm’s affection towards Sister Evelyn, the reason why they chose to mail him an anonymous letter with recordings of Elijah Muhammad’s secret extramarital activities. Malcolm talked about it to other top officers in the NOI, a sign that was interpreted as a personal power build-up. FBI informants participated in circulating this false notion and apparently achieved their aim by causing Elijah Muhammad to excommunicate Malcolm X initially for three months.

The FBI fuelled the flames of hostility within the fold of the NOI. In a memo dated February 7, 1964, they suggested a move that would widen the rift between these two leaders, and leading to Malcolm’s exclusion from the NOI (Marable, 2011). When Malcolm X made his comment on the assassination of President Kennedy describing it as a “case of chickens coming home to roost,” Elijah Muhammad found in it a good opportunity to suspend him as National Representative (Haley, 1964, p.191). In March 1964, he extended his suspension to an unlimited duration. Malcolm’s reaction consisted in the establishment of Muslim Mosque, Inc.

Sometime later, Malcolm X began verbal assaults on Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam (Sabin, 2018). He accused the organization of deliberately holding back the black revolution. He then accused the Nation of conspiring with the right wing of white Americans. He also said that what Elijah Muhammad was teaching was an insult to the entire Muslim world. The “Messenger” was portrayed as a corrupted man, more interested in money, wealth, and sex than black progress. Six days later, Malcolm was assassinated (Marsh, 2000).

In the same atmosphere of social and racial unrest shaking America in the 1960s, the Nation of Islam was a target for the FBI (Bazian, 2012). The latter made a plan to infiltrate the organization and disrupt it and render it without impact on the black community. A letter from the director of the FBI sent to all field offices dated August 25, 1967 shows this agency’s plan to deter the NOI (FBI, 1967). The director also sent another letter to all field offices on January 7, 1969 with the same objective (FBI, 1969). He ordered the offices to open immediately a file under the caption: Counterintelligence Program –Black Nationalist-Hate Groups, Internal Security. This aimed at collecting intelligence on this group and waiting for a specific operation or technique for implementation later on. The purpose of this counterintelligence endeavour was to expose and

disrupt the hate-type organizations or even neutralize them. In the director's words, it was:

... to expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize the activities of black nationalist, hate-type organizations and groupings, their leadership, spokesmen, membership, and supporters, and to counter their propensity for violence and civil disorder (FBI, 1967).

The plan for secret intervention on behalf of the Bureau is explicit in this letter. It was not a mission confined to intelligence and prevention, but rather one of disrupting, misdirecting, or neutralizing leaderships, spokesmen, and supporters. The FBI was not satisfied with this, it went even further as to cooperate with the local news media in order to publicize the NOI and neutralize it with this method. The letter further states, "The pernicious background of such groups, their duplicity, and devious manoeuvres must be exposed to public scrutiny where such publicity will have a neutralizing effect" (FBI, 1967).

Even the recruiting of new youthful adherents was to be discouraged and the personal conflicts of the leaderships as well as the organizational conflicts between the NOI and other black groups were to be exploited for the goal of neutralizing them. It can be read:

Efforts of various groups to consolidate their forces to recruit new or youthful adherents must be frustrated. No opportunity should be missed to exploit through counterintelligence techniques the organizational and personal conflicts of the leaderships of the groups and where possible an effort should be made to capitalize upon existing conflicts between Black Nationalist organizations (FBI, 1967).

Further, it states the eventual cooperation of the news media and the sources available to the Seat of Government for the common goal of disrupting the NOI and other Black-Nationalist groups:

When an opportunity is apparent to disrupt or neutralize black -nationalist, hate-type organizations through the cooperation of the local news media contacts or through such contact with sources available to the Seat of Government ... careful attention must be given to the proposal to insure the targeted group is disrupted and not merely publicized. (FBI, 1967).

The FBI resorted to one of its old methods in utilizing cooperative journalists to channel derogatory information about the NOI. In December 1968, the special agent in charge in Chicago furnished William Jones, the *Chicago Tribune* journalist, with the data gathered by the Bureau about the fraudulent aspects of the Nation and its economic program (Marsh, 2000). The article appeared on January 26, 1969, with the title "Black Muslims Set Their Sights on the Supremacy of Capitalism." The article, which was meant primarily to expose the NOI to its followers and the general public, had contrary effects. It contributed widely to the publicization of the organization and filling its ranks with more recruits. This led Elijah Muhammad to write an open letter to this newspaper to thank them for mentioning his organization.

This method had two edges. In another instance, it got the damaging effect sought by the FBI. In Miami, the FBI division furnished Richard Whitcomb from Channel 7 of WCKT-TV in January 1969 with material to produce a documentary film aiming at defaming the NOI and hampering its future activities (Churchill, 2001). He was requested to expose and ridicule the Nation of Islam's moneymaking schemes, which consisted in milking the members in order to fill Elijah Muhammad's coffers. The program that was aired in October 1969 under the title "Fear of the Secret Dark," showed the leaders of this organization as people with questionable character who lived in luxury through the money collected from the members. It was in the eyes of the Bureau an exemplary success (Marsh, 2000). In the following weekly meeting of the NOI in Miami, the

attendance by visitors dropped by 50 percent.

The director of the FBI further commissioned his officers to prevent the black leaders from spreading their philosophy publicly or through the mass media (FBI, 1968). The officers were also called to expose the pernicious past of the black leaders among whom those with immoral backgrounds, criminal records, and subversive activity, and to determine evidence of misappropriation of funds by the latter. The targeted black organizations were the Student Nonviolent Committee (SNCC),¹⁴ the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC),¹⁵ Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM),¹⁶ and the NOI. Particular attention was to be given to extremist leaders like Stokely Carmichael,¹⁷ H. "Rap" Brown,¹⁸ Elijah Muhammad, and Maxwell Stanford.¹⁹

The aforementioned FBI letter included all groups of black movements. Yet, on January 7, 1969, another letter originating from the FBI director had as its sole object the Nation of Islam. In this one, the FBI director admitted that this group did not advocate violence, but thought that the potential threat stemmed from preaching hatred of the white race and racial separatism and that it had the largest Black Nationalist newspaper being used by black extremists. The director thought that the NOI appeared to be the personal fiefdom of Elijah Muhammad and expected a power struggle to take place after his death (FBI, 1969). He then called upon his officers to be ready to destroy the organization through factionalism or change its philosophy to a strictly religious, self-improvement one:

The NOI appears to be the personal fiefdom of Elijah Muhammad. When he dies a power struggle can be expected and the NOI could change direction. We should be prepared for this eventuality. We should plan how to change the philosophy of the NOI into one of the strictly religious and self-improvement orientation, deleting the race hatred and separate nationhood aspects. (FBI, 1969).

What the FBI director expected and wished did really happen to the NOI after the death of Elijah Muhammad in 1975. His son, Warith Deen Muhammad, the new Supreme Minister of Islam, proceeded to turn it into a strictly religious organization much closer to Islam, and devoid of race hatred and separatism. As to whether this change was the working of the FBI infiltrated agents or a mere coincidence to the wish of this federal agency, there is no information yet. The FBI archives made a great number of deletions on the texts pertaining to this subject so that it is unexpected to make a clear judgment (Gardell, 1996).

After considering the study of the potential leaders of the organization, their strengths, weaknesses and the methods to be used to turn or neutralize them, the director considered the alternative of changing its philosophy or destroying it. He wrote in a secret letter to the field bureaus:

The alternative to changing the philosophy of the NOI is the destruction of the organization. This might be accomplished through generating factionalism among contenders for Elijah Muhammad's leadership or through legal action in probate court on his death. Chicago should consider the question of how to generate the factionalism necessary to destroy the NOI by splitting into several groups (FBI, 1969).

As to factionalism, it took place in 1978 when Louis Farrakhan separated from the organization that Warith Deen Muhammad led and which received the new appellation of the World Community of Al-Islam in the West (WCIW) (Allen, 1996). Farrakhan would take with him a number of followers much less than that which would remain with Warith D. Muhammad, and would resuscitate the old NOI with most of its original philosophy. Later, more and smaller splinter

groups established smaller organizations with more or less the same name of the NOI. The World Community of al –Islam in the West (WCIW) adherents became simply Muslims like all Muslims throughout the world, without an umbrella organization. However, the Nation of Islam as resurrected by Farrakhan is still active and well publicized, which still leads many Americans to confuse Islam for what this organization represents. The other organizations are small and weak, but they still exist (Allen, 1996).

After highlighting this evolution of the NOI, occurring after the execution of the Counterintelligence programs, we make a return to the FBI letter on this question for further clarification. The director ended his letter by considering the possibility of bringing legal action against the NOI in probate court, by studying the various soft points in the organization. The Bureau had to find out whether Elijah Muhammad had a will or not, whether the NOI was incorporated and where its bank accounts were. In whose name were the NOI assets, mosque buildings and businesses? He also wondered if the Chicago field office had a “confidential source” in probate administration to make the tying up of the NOI in probate court possible. (FBI, 1969)

To follow up the evolution of the counterintelligence programs in this scrutiny, it should be mentioned that Hoover terminated them officially in 1971, with the clause “except in exceptional instances.” The following year, he died on May 2. The termination came as a result of the attack of a group of Americans called the Citizens’ Commission to Investigate the FBI on an agency in Media, Pennsylvania, on March 8, 1971 (Churchill, 2001). The citizens got away with a thousand pieces of FBI secret reports and sent them to the press to create an embarrassing scandal to this agency and the Federal Government. When the general public learnt about the counterintelligence methods, they started to wonder why the Government resorted to them to neutralize dissidents in an officially free and democratic nation. Following this scandal, the public started a debate in the press (Churchill, 2001). Some of the opinions ended by blaming it on Hoover personally, stressing that he had too much power. However, the answer was not here, for he was one in a team.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, we join our opinion to that of Garrow²⁰ who argued that the FBI was combating a cultural threat, and that the agency was a mere reflection of mainstream American cultural values and society. He said that “the essence of the bureau’s social role has been not to attack critics, communists, blacks or leftists per se, but to repress all perceived threats to the dominant, status-quo oriented political culture...the Bureau was not a deviant institution in American society, but actually a more representative and faithful one” (Garrow, 1986, as cited in Gardell, 1996, p. 93).

In this logic, the NOI philosophy was a threat to “Americanity” or the civil religion of the Republic of the United States. Garrow believes that it was the idea that America was a melting pot to which immigrants with various religions and denominations came, and that the latter were supposed to substitute their old identities with the American one. Americans still see America as the fulfilment of mankind’s ambition to create a better world, away from totalitarian repression. He sees that Americanity is the sacred expression of the American Dream²¹, preaching all the values, norms, and ideals of the American way of life. Americans saw Totalitarianism during the Cold War as Communism, but Islam has recently gradually come to replace it.

Islam was not incorporated in the American way of life. Initially, the inter-Protestant divisions were transcended and in the late nineteenth-century Roman Catholicism was accepted as Christian. Later on, after the Second World War, Judaism was in turn accepted, forming thus a Judeo-Christian culture. Islam, however, remained alien to this American culture. African Americans entered America as slaves and Muslim Arab immigrants from Greater Syria entered

starting from 1860 and kept a low profile as they knew the traditional Christian antagonism to Islam. The Islamic presence did not contribute to Americanism. On the contrary, Islam along with Communism were seen as “cultures of evil.” As a result, African Americans and Muslims found themselves placed in a position that was opposed to the American Dream. That was why agents of the FBI, carefully selected from conservative white American males, saw in the NOI their personal foe. They were defending the American Tradition from the “Islam” of the NOI.

Finally, it could be said that the FBI sought to turn the NOI into a strictly religious, racial hate free organization or destroy it in order to protect the US communities. Moreover, the racism of the FBI staff could also be cited as a motive for the struggle against the NOI. Anyway, four years after the termination of the Counterintelligence Programs, the Black Muslims entered a new phase of their evolution. Warith would make them undergo a mass conversion to Islam.

Comments and explanations

1 The Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) was a branch of an international movement founded in 1914 that stressed black pride, racial unity of African-Americans, and the need to redeem Africa from white rule. Dubbed the "back to Africa" movement, the UNIA's doctrines emphasized racial pride, entrepreneurialism, and Pan-Africanism. Founder Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican, opened branches in 30 U.S. cities between 1916-22. He established the Black Star Steamship Line, the Negro Factory Corp., and a newspaper, the Negro World, in which he articulated the frustrations of working-class (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023).

2 Marcus Garvey was a Jamaican-born Black nationalist and leader of the Pan-Africanism movement, which sought to unify and connect people of African descent worldwide. In the United States, he was a noted civil rights activist who founded the Negro World newspaper, a shipping company called Black Star Line and the Universal Negro Improvement Association, or UNIA, a fraternal organization of black nationalists. As a group, they advocated for “separate but equal” status for persons of African ancestry, and as such they sought to establish independent Black states around the world, notably in Liberia on the west coast of Africa (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023).

3 William Edward Burghardt Du Bois 1868 – 1963) was a noted scholar, editor, and African American activist. Du Bois was a founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP -- the largest and oldest civil rights organization in America (Dennis, 2015).

4 The Nation of Islam (NOI) is an African American religious movement that originated in Detroit, Michigan, during the 1930s based on a rather heterodox form of the Muslim religion. Founded by the enigmatic Wallace D. Fard and taken over by the Honorable Elijah Muhammad upon Fard's disappearance in 1934 (Soage, 2013).

5 The Mexican-American War (April 1846-February 1848) ended with the victory of the USA over Mexico. It stemmed from Mexican anger at the US annexation of Texas in 1845 and from a dispute over whether Texas ended at the Nueces River or the Rio Grande. The land that the USA acquired by this war measured 500,000 square miles (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023).

6 The Red Summer of 1919 refers to the summer and fall of 1919, in which race riots exploded in a number of cities in both the North and South. It was a national frenzy of clashes, massacres and lynchings throughout the North and the South. All were started by whites and blacks had to fight back (Ellis, 1919).

7 The Mau Mau was a militant nationalist movement that originated in the 1950s among the Kikuyu people of Kenya. It advocated violent resistance to British domination in Kenya and promoted the independence of Kenya (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023).

8 In full VIET NAM DOC LAP DONG MINH HOI, English League for The Independence of Vietnam, organization that led the struggle for Vietnamese independence from French rule. It was formed in China in May 1941 by Ho Chi Minh (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023).

9 The Selective Service Act set up the Selective Service System, the first peacetime conscription in US history. The Act passed the US Congress on May 18, 1917 and gave the President the power to draft soldiers. The Selective Service Act required that men between the ages 21 and 30 register with local draft boards. (The age was later changed to 18-45) (Mennell, 1999).

10 Black Panther Party For Self-Defense was originally an American black revolutionary party founded in 1966 in California by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. Its original purpose was to patrol black ghettos to protect residents from acts of police brutality. The Panthers eventually developed into a Marxist revolutionary group that called for

arming all blacks, the exemption of blacks from the draft and from all sanctions, the release of all blacks from prison...The party was disbanded by the early 1980s (Duncan, 2023).

11 David Dellinger (August 22, 1915 – May 25, 2004) was a renowned pacifist and activist for nonviolent social change, and one of the most influential American radicals in the 20th century. He was most famous for being one of the Chicago Seven, a group of protesters whose disruption of the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago led to charges of conspiracy and crossing state lines with the intention of inciting a riot. The ensuing court case was turned by Dellinger and his codefendants into a nationally –publicized platform for putting the Viet Nam War on trial (Scatamacchia, 2015).

12 Philip Berrigan (October 5, 1923 – December 6, 2002) was an internationally renowned peace activist, Christian anarchist and Roman Catholic priest. Along with his brother Daniel Berrigan, he was for a time on the FBI Ten Most Wanted Fugitives' list for actions against war (McCarthy, 2016).

13 Elijah Muhammad, born Elijah Poole in 1897, led the Nation of Islam from the time of the disappearance of its founder, Wali Fard Muhammad, until his death in 1975. In the 1960s he was described as the “most powerful Blackman in America” and remains among the most influential American Muslims. It is through his efforts that thousands of African Americans were first introduced to Islam and the Qur'an, including Malcolm X, his son Warith Deen Mohammed, and Louis Farrakhan, even if the former two eventually moved to a more traditional Sunni understanding of Islam. Elijah Muhammad's unique formulation of Islam—particularly casting Islam in racist tones, including the origin of the white race six thousand years ago and the struggle between black Muslims and white Christians at end of the world—prompted many other Muslims to assert that Elijah (Fishman, 2013).

14 The Student Nonviolent Committee (SNCC) was founded in 1960 for the purpose of coordinating the sit-in movement then sweeping the South in an attempt to integrate bus stations, lunch counters, and the like (Stoper, 1977).

15 Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) was an organization of black churches and ministers which, under the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr., formed the backbone of the Civil Rights Movement in the US during the 1950s through the 1960s. It was founded in 1957 after the Bus Boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, during 1955 and 1956. It was closely associated with King (Arnon & Bloom, 2022).

16 Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) was a black secret movement with the objective of building a revolutionary cadre among dispossessed urban ghetto dwellers. To this end, RAM infiltrated civil rights organizations and encouraged a shift toward Marxism and Revolutionary Black Nationalism (Amador, 2009).

17 Stokely Carmichael (1941-1998), also known as Kwame Ture, was Trinidadian-American black activist and leader of SNCC and Black Panther Party. He later became a black separatist and Pan-Africanist. He was jailed because of the March Against Fear started by James Meredith and carried on by him after the assassination of the latter. After his release, he gave his “Black Power” speech to urge black pride and independence. Black Power became a rallying cry for young African Americans across the country (Churcher, 1966).

18 H. “Rap” Brown (1943-) joined SNCC and became national director after Stokely Carmichael left it in 1967. In 1968 he abandoned his pacifist beliefs and joined the Black Panther Party. He had extremist views. In the early 1970s, he was captured in armed robbery and jailed. After his paroling in 1976, he converted to Islam and changed his name to Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin. In 2000, he was found guilty of murder and imprisoned for life (Cable, 2016).

19 Maxwell Stanford was a black militant student from Philadelphia, who joined the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) with Malcolm X in 1963. He influenced both the National Student Youth movement and the Students for a Democratic Society in the early 1960s with a vision of radical Black Nationalism. He fused the thought of Robert F. Williams on armed self-defense with the philosophy of Malcolm X on black self-determination. To this, he added a Marxian revolutionary philosophy (Cha – Jua, 2007).

20 David J. Garrow is the author of **Bearing the Cross** (Marrow), a Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Martin Luther King, Jr., and **Liberty and Sexuality** (California), a history of America's reproductive rights struggle (Downing, 1986).

21 The American Dream is the idea held by many in the USA that through hard work, courage, and determination one can achieve financial prosperity. These were values held by many early settlers, and have been passed on to subsequent generations. What the American Dream has become is a question under constant discussion, and some believe that it has led to an emphasis on material wealth as a measure of success and/or happiness (Cullen, 2003).

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