

Herbert Berg's *Elijah Muhammad and Islam* is a welcome contribution to a nascent body of scholarship on Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam (NOI). Berg's concise book contextualizes Elijah Muhammad's Islamic ministry throughout his forty-year reign in the black separatist NOI. Berg draws on Elijah Muhammad's writings, speeches and declassified government files to chart the Muslim leader's understanding of and contribution to Islam in its American context. *Elijah Muhammad and Islam* is unique in that it is the only scholarly book that deals exclusively with Elijah Muhammad as a religious figure.

Elijah Muhammad has been overlooked by scholars and writers as a major figure in Islam in the US because his doctrine was far removed from the basic principles of the Muslim faith. Berg's book challenges previously published studies that place Muhammad at the periphery of the resurgence of Islam in America. He argues that the lengths to which Muhammad defended and promoted Islam illustrate that his commitment to propagating the Muslim faith, as he understood it, was "personal and genuine" (2).

Berg's book is divided into six chapters that explore the Muslim presence in the US prior to the NOI's emergence in 1930, Elijah Muhammad's life, his ministry and his interactions with orthodox Muslims.

Berg provides a solid context for discussing the Muslim presence in the US prior to 1930. His analysis extends to a brief discussion of the Muslim slave presence, the Ahmadiyya movement and the Moorish Science Temple of America (MSTA). Surprisingly, only a minor section of the opening chapter is devoted to exploring the "murky records" (24) relating to the NOI's founder, Wallace D. Fard Muhammad. Berg's analysis stops short of exploring a possible interaction between Fard Muhammad and the MSTTA and ultimately fails to alleviate the deficit of scholarly attention attributed to the formative years of the NOI.

Scholarship on the NOI during the black consciousness era focusses inordinately on Elijah Muhammad's protégé, Malcolm X. Indeed, it is only in recent years that scholars have challenged entrenched views that Malcolm X was the real architect of the black Muslim movement. Berg's book marks a welcome departure from "Malcolm-centric" approaches to studying the NOI. However, in his efforts to showcase Elijah Muhammad's religiosity, Berg avoids more than mentioning his subject's less palatable characteristics. Muhammad's sexual exploits with several of his young secretaries are mentioned only briefly and the impact of his transgressions on both his family and followers is not discussed. The narrative of Elijah Muhammad's life provided in chapter 2 covers in rich detail Muhammad's career in the NOI. Berg's analysis is informed by an abundance of archival and secondary sources that outline both Muhammad's early career and his later efforts to legitimize his movement. The brief section of the chapter that Berg allocates to discussing the relationship between Muhammad and Malcolm X could have been extended to exploring, if only briefly, the political and ideological differences between the two men. Ultimately, the chapter avoids extending

or outlining debates surrounding Malcolm's eventual defection from the NOI in 1964.

Berg's chapter on "Elijah Muhammad, Other Muslims and Islam" is a valuable contribution to our understanding of Muhammad's relationship with orthodox Muslims. Scholars and outside observers of Elijah Muhammad's movement have overwhelmingly argued that it cannot be regarded as "truly" Islamic because its doctrine relies on racial myths and narrows its membership to African Americans. Yet, as Berg argues, Muhammad, directly and indirectly, brought thousands of African Americans to knowledge of the Muslim faith (146). Berg's detailed analysis of Elijah Muhammad's ministry sheds light on the Muslim leader's use and understanding of the Qur'an, something that has not previously been critiqued.

*Elijah Muhammad and Islam* is a pioneering study of Elijah Muhammad's life and Islamic legacy. The book significantly deepens our understanding of Muhammad's religious authenticity and is an important contribution to scholarship on the NOI during his time in power.

*University of Ulster*

DAWN-MARIE GIBSON