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Perceptions and Experiences in Elijah Muhammad's Economic Program: Voices from the Pioneers

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PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES IN ELIJAH MUHAMMAD'S ECONOMIC PROGRAM: VOICES FROM THE PIONEERS

by

NAFEESA H. MUHAMMAD

Under the Direction of Akinyele Umoja

ABSTRACT

During Elijah Muhammad's tenure as leader of the Nation of Islam, he launched an economic program that sought to empower black people in America. This study examines the perceptions and experiences of five individuals who were directly involved in Muhammad's economic program using a phenomenological approach. The findings of this study revealed that this program helped them develop an identity, provided a way out of economic oppression, improved their work ethic, made them economically self-sufficient, and the pioneers believe that this program has current applications.

INDEX WORDS: Elijah Muhammad, Nation of Islam, Black economic development, Black capitalism, Protestant Ethic, Religion and economic development

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NAFEESA H. MUHAMMAD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2010

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2010

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Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

May 2010

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my mother and father---all that I am and all that I do is because of you both. I thank the Creator for allowing me to pass through two beautiful vessels.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my thesis committee for their guidance and support during the completion of this thesis. Special thanks to Dr. Jonathan Gayles for providing insights on the methodology used in this project. I would also like to thank Dr. Audrea Dunham for assisting me with the theoretical concepts presented in this paper. I extend an "appreciative" thank you to Dr. Akinyele Umoja whose knowledge, devotion, and expertise was more than beneficial for the completion of this thesis.

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Finally, to the pioneers of the Nation of Islam who shared with me their perceptions of and experiences in Elijah Muhammad's economic program. I am so thankful that I have captured your stories and through all of you, I believe that many of the economic problems facing indigent populations can be overcome.

Thank You All!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Wallace Fard Muhammad founded the Nation of Islam in the United States in 1930. He began teaching black people an unorthodox form of Islam in the poverty-stricken areas of Detroit, Michigan. For instance, he taught blacks that they were the chosen righteous people and that white people represented the antithesis of this (Turner, 1997). Moreover, he expressed that the proper religion for blacks in America was Islam. According to him, Christianity represented slavery and suffering. His avant-garde teachings appealed to many impoverished blacks who quickly joined the movement. In three years, he recruited approximately eight thousand of them (Lincoln, 1994; Udom, 1962). Among these converts was Elijah Poole, later to become the enigmatic leader of the organization and to assume the name Elijah Muhammad.

Elijah Muhammad received his teaching about the relationship between Islam and black people in America directly from Wallace Fard Muhammad for an estimated three and a half years. He became the leader of the Nation of Islam when Wallace Fard Muhammad disappeared in 1934 and worked to expand the organization to various cities in the United States (Clegg, 1997; Udom, 1962). He also worked to give the Nation of Islam the reputation of a Black Nationalist organization that would help African Americans fight the systemic oppression of white America. To achieve this goal, he developed and executed an economic program for blacks to "help fight against poverty and want (Muhammad, 1965, p. 192)."

Elijah Muhammad's economic agenda included a Twelve Point Program, an Economic Blueprint, and a Three Year Economic Plan also known as the National Savings Plan. The content in his economic philosophy resonated with many black Americans as they followed his "do for self" program. Under Muhammad's leadership, many businesses were established. These businesses employed many blacks (Clegg, 1997; "Nation of Islam Deserted," 1979; Udom,

1962). Not only did Muhammad create jobs for those blacks who were unemployed or seeking further job opportunities, but also some members opened their own businesses ("Islam Helps Brother, 1965,"; Udom, 1962).

The economic program of the movement declined after the death of Elijah Muhammad in 1975. Following his demise, division and factionalism overtook the movement. Some members broke away from the group to form their own organizations (Marsh, 1996.) Such was the case of two different groups under the auspices of Wallace Deen Muhammad and Minister Louis Farrakhan.

This study is concerned with understanding and capturing how Elijah Muhammad's economic program impacted the pioneers or those who were directly involved in the economic program prior and up to 1975. Through the voices of the pioneers, this study also seeks to understand their perceptions and experiences of the program. A review of the literature does reveal that Elijah Muhammad implemented an economic plan for black people in America (Clegg, 1997; Lee, 1996; Lincoln, 1961; Tyler, 1966; Udom, 1962). Nevertheless, what it does not thoroughly capture is the voices of those who were involved in his program. Elijah Muhammad is credited with building one of the largest and richest black organizations in America. He is considered a Black Nationalist and cultural nationalist because he has reshaped and influenced black people's consciousness. Therefore, it is worth gathering the pioneers perceptions and experiences of this program and how it impacted their lives.

This chapter will address the background to the research problem and it includes a problem statement. The purpose and significance of the study is identified. Key words will also be identified and defined. The method and theoretical framework is discussed as well as the limitations of this study.

Background of the Problem

Historically, black Americans have always encountered economic problems. After emancipation, the majority of black people struggled to create a new life in the United States. Freed blacks were now looking for jobs, housing, and land. However, they quickly realized that there were limitations on how they could benefit from their basic rights of citizenship. Federal governments set up laws blocking their rights to move freely, vote, and own property. The Freedman's Bureau provided aid to millions of blacks by creating hospitals, shelters, and educational institutions. However, this operation did not solve the injustices afflicting black people. Hence, there were still thousands of freed blacks living in ignorance, poverty, and dealing with racist threats (Fulop, 1991; Jones, 1982). Reconstruction proved to be an utter failure and America entered the nadir period where white racism was declared worse than any post-bellum period. Lynching, mob violence, economic setbacks, disenfranchisement, race riots, and Jim Crow permeated this moment in history (Litwack, 2004).

In response to the persistent economic problems black people faced, some African American leaders offered alternative paradigms for advancement; black capitalism. Black capitalism posits that blacks can economically improve as a group through individualistic entrepreneurial strategies. It further suggests that entrepreneurial activity by group members can enhance the status and power of the whole group (Villemez & Beggs, 1984).

Relying on the success of the black elite's economic development efforts before and after the Civil War, Booker T. Washington proposed that African Americans learn the skills of industrial farming techniques and establish private enterprises. In his exposition address, Washington stressed that developing the skills needed to learn the crafts of industrial farming techniques was a major part of the solution to black people's economic problem. Learning how to work with

one's hands or taking up an industrial trade or skill was more important than fighting for a seat in the legislature. In other words, Washington wanted black people to build a strong economic base from the bottom up. This would not be hard to do since black people already possessed these skills from the days of enslavement (Washington, 1895).

Marcus Garvey agreed with Washington's stance about black people developing technical and industrial skills. Using Washington's stance on the benefits of economic development, Garvey established the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and created an ambitious economic chain of businesses throughout the United States. The establishments included the Negro Factories Corporation and the Black Star Line. Garvey launched his enterprises during the "Golden Years" of Black Nationalism (1919-1929). The success of these ventures was viewed as progressive. Opponents of Garvey's economic philosophy even admitted to the success of his business enterprises. DuBois acknowledged that the black entrepreneurial elite were a progressive force in the crusade against Jim Crow (Marable, 2000; Rogers, 1955).

However, even in the midst of such economic prosperity, black businesses encountered risks in a racist society. Whites found it very difficult to deal with the economic success of any black person. Garvey's outstanding movement came to abrupt end when the Federal government accused him of using the mail to defraud thousands of blacks who trusted him. It is estimated that between 1919 and 1921, Garvey collected over ten million dollars. At court, the jury found Garvey guilty and he was sentenced to five years in an Atlanta jail. In 1927 he was deported to Jamaica (Clarke, 1974; Rogers, 1955).

The UNIA's decline can be attributed to a number of factors. The 1920s was shaped by the Great Migration and the Harlem Renaissance. However, black people were confronted with untold adversities. For example, blacks fled to northern cities during the migration because of the

heinous racial acts taking place in the south such as lynching. Moreover, the United States passed a series of laws that led to the creation of the Immigration Act of 1924. This act enforced an "Asian Barred Zone" and prevented Asians from entering the United States, but it also affected immigrants not located within the Asian Barred Zone as record shows that their numbers significantly declined. One example of Muslims who suffered from this act is the group of Muslim missionaries of the Ahmadiyya Movement. These were Indian Muslim immigrants from the Punjab region who were prevented from entering the United States as a result of the Immigration Act (Williams, 1998). Garvey's movement was not immune to racism and discrimination during this time period.

With the deportation of Garvey in 1927 and the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, the masses of African Americans faced yet an even harsher pressure as they were left to bear the brunt of the economic depression that followed. No one was hit harder during the depression than members of the black race who had already been suffering higher unemployment rates than whites before the depression (Gusmorino, 1996; Schraff, 1990). For example, in 1933, about 40% of black workers were unemployed. Furthermore, there was a brief hiatus as far as Black Nationalist ideology is concerned. After the decline of the UNIA, there was no prominent Black Nationalist movement in America from 1927 to 1929 (Turner, 1997). Therefore, when the Nation of Islam was founded in 1930, it revived the spark that was slowly disappearing in Black Nationalism.

Under the auspices of Elijah Muhammad, the Nation of Islam advanced economic strategies to help African Americans fight economic oppression in America. During the decades of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s the economic problems blacks faced continued to soar. For example, during the 1950s and 1960s, black people accounted for 20% of those unemployed yet comprised

of only 10% of America's workforce (Sitton, 1963). Walter P. Reuther, then head of the United Automobile Workers and the Industrial Union Department of the A.F.L.-C.I.O. exclaimed, "We will not solve education or housing or public accommodations as long as millions of American Negroes are treated as second class economic citizens and denied jobs (Sitton, 1963, p. E3). It is in response to these economic inequities that Elijah Muhammad created an economic program.

The Economic Philosophy and Program of Elijah Muhammad

Elijah Muhammad did not believe that the U.S.A. could adequately provide for African Americans: "We do not believe that America will ever be able to furnish enough jobs for her own millions of unemployed in addition to jobs for 20,000,000 black people (Muhammad, 1965, p. 164)." As a result he developed a program that consisted of a Twelve Point Program and a Three Year Economic Plan. The following was Muhammad's Twelve Point Program in which he outlined his practical strategy for separation and economic prosperity.

1. Separate yourselves from the "slave-master"
2. Pool your resources, education, and qualifications for independence
3. Stop forcing yourselves into places where you are not wanted
4. Make your own place a decent place to live
5. Rid yourselves of the lust of wine and drink and learn to love self and kind before loving others
6. Unite and create a future for yourself
7. Build your own homes, schools, hospitals, and factories
8. Do not seek to mix your blood through racial integration
9. Stop buying expensive cars, fine clothes and shoes before being able to live in a fine home
10. Spend money among yourselves
11. Build an economic system among yourselves
12. Protect your women (Muhammad, 1965, p. 171).

Elijah Muhammad wanted black Americans to have money, good homes, and friendships in all walks of life. To attain this, he put forth the following economic blueprint and urged black Americans to:

1. Recognize the necessity for unity and group operation
2. Pool your resources, physically as well as financially
3. Stop wanton criticisms of everything that is black-owned and black-operated
4. Keep in mind jealousy destroys from within
5. Observe the operations of the white man. He is successful. He makes no excuses for his failures. He works in a collective manner. You do the same (Muhammad, 1965, p. 174).

Elijah Muhammad knew that just laying out economic propositions was not sufficient to establish a separate black economy. His program had to contain a practical component, thus he created the Three Year Economic Plan. Under this plan he urged black people to sacrifice for three years where they could only purchase up to three suits a year never to exceed $65 in cost. A pair of shoes could not exceed $16 in cost. He urged black people in America to spend only according to their income and save money (Muhammad, 1965). Muhammad's economic plan was not only for members in his organization, but he extended it to black people throughout the United States. He stated;

> I appeal to all Muslims, and to all the members of the original Black nation in America, to sacrifice at least five cents from each day's pay to create an "Economic Savings Program" to help fight unemployment, abominable housing, hunger, and nakedness of the 22 million black people here in America who continue to face these problems (Muhammad, 1965, p. 192).

According to Muhammad, if blacks followed the Three Year Economic Plan, the money saved should be used to purchase arable land where vegetables can be grown and cattle can be raised. He also encouraged blacks to purchase real estate and buy timberland. The timber could be used to build homes for poor blacks. The purchase of clay land could be used to make brick houses, which, upon completion, could be sold at affordable prices to indigent people in black communities (Muhammad, 1965).

The Three Year Economic Plan was well received by members involved in the movement. Those members who could afford to do so pledged one-tenth to one-third of their income to the economic program. Some patronized businesses owned and operated by the Nation of Islam (Udom, 1962). Some others were so inspired by Muhammad's economic program that they opened up their own businesses, which they often advertised in the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper ("Islam Helps Brother," 1965).

Under Elijah Muhammad's leadership, many different businesses were organized throughout the United States. The Nation of Islam had farms, guesthouses, dress shops, dry cleaners, bakeries and restaurants. Some of the businesses included Your Supermarket, Shabazz Grocery, Chicago Lamb Packers, Shabazz Bakery, Good Foods, Shabazz Restaurant, Salaam Restaurant, Shabazz Barber Shop, and clothing factories. These businesses supplied groceries, meats, bakery products, cooked meals, and clothing to both Muslims and non-Muslims at affordable prices. These businesses also offered a wide variety of employment ranging from managers, clerks, secretaries, bakers, cooks, butchers, waiters, accountants, mathematicians, technicians, plumbers, and carpenters to name these few. Muslims and non-Muslims were employed in the businesses owned and operated by the Nation of Islam ("Nation of Islam Deserted," 1979).

Muhammad's nationalistic view on building a separate black world through economic development led a significant number of downhearted and distressed blacks to his movement. Many of these blacks joined the movement because Muhammad addressed both religious and material matters (Udom, 1962). The ultimate appeal of the Nation of Islam was that it gave black Americans a chance to identify with a force that was strong enough to triumph over economic oppression in America (Lincoln, 1994).

Problem Statement and Purpose of the Study

The economic program of the Nation of Islam reached its zenith during the 1950s through the mid 1970s. Some scholars posit that Elijah Muhammad's economic program was successful on many levels because it led to material wealth and provided jobs and economic stability to many blacks during intense economic oppression (Mamiya, 1982; Tyler, 1966; Udom, 1962). Some critics argue that black economic strategies, including those advanced by the Elijah Muhammad led to the "underdevelopment" of black America (Marable, 2000; Shipp, 1996; Sturdivant, 1969). According to these scholars, Elijah Muhammad capitalized off of black labor. However, there have not been extensive studies that actually explore Muhammad's economic program through the voices of the participants. After reviewing the literature, there were two major gaps as it pertains to the Nation of Islam. 1. There are few studies that discuss Elijah Muhammad's economic program. 2. Few studies assess how this program benefitted the pioneers or those directly involved in it. There also needs to be more studies that evaluate how African American religious institutions help black people advance their lives on an economic level (Littlefield, 2005). This study sought to fulfill these gaps by capturing the experiences of individuals actively involved in Elijah Muhammad's economic program as well as how this program has helped or enriched their lives.

Who are the Pioneers?

The pioneers are those individuals who were registered members of the Nation of Islam during Elijah Muhammad's tenure as leader of the movement. The pioneers are the ones who worked within the economic program i.e. the businesses, the temple, and the farms during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. The purpose of this study was to examine the pioneers' perceptions of

and experiences in Elijah Muhammad's economic program. In other words, this study describes how this program has helped the pioneer and is not simply an evaluation of Muhammad's economic program. The overall research inquiries were: How did the program impact the pioneer? What were the pioneer's perceptions of Elijah Muhammad's economic program? What were the pioneer's experiences while involved in the program? Such inquiries attempt to fill the major gaps identified. It is relevant to the field of African American Studies because it reveals insights into how economic development strategies impact those who are economically oppressed.

Research Design and Method

The general purpose of this study was to understand the pioneer's perceptions and experiences in Elijah Muhammad's economic program as well as understand how this program impacted their lives. Five pioneers who were registered members of the Nation of Islam prior to 1975 in Atlanta, GA were interviewed in this study. The study used a purposive sampling technique, meaning that the researcher had a specific predefined group in mind prior to carrying out the study. According to Trochim and Donnelly, this purposive sampling speaks to external validity and generalization.

External validity is related to generalizing. It "refers to the approximate truth of conclusions that involve generalizations (Trochim & Donnelly, 2006 p. 245)." In other words, external validity measures if the results of a study can hold true for other people in the target population rather than only the ones included in the sample (Trochim & Donnelly, 2006). In this study, the responses from the pioneers are not reflective of what all members felt during Elijah Muhammad's tenure as leader of the movement. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized and is limited to the five individuals in the sample. This study does attempt to fill the gaps in the historiography of the Nation of Islam as it pertains to the organization's economic program

and how it impacted the members involved. Results reveal that the pioneer's perceptions and experiences of Elijah Muhammad's economic program was an empowering one.

This study was a phenomenological qualitative study. Qualitative studies place a strong emphasis on understanding the realities and experiences of the sample population by listening attentively to their words and observing their actions and expressions during the interview. Using a qualitative approach assessed the pioneer's perceptions and experiences of Elijah Muhammad's economic program as well as how the program impacted their lives. A qualitative approach allowed the researcher to discover contextual and meaningful findings rather than just sweeping generalizations ("Qualitative Paradigm"). Furthermore, qualitative research seeks to understand the sample population's subjective reality (Mathie & Camozzi, 2005). According to L.T. Smith, this study is considered culturally responsive research because it did not seek to exploit the pioneer's views on Muhammad's economic program, but rather committed itself to telling their truth (Smith, 1999).

Specifically, this study used a phenomenological approach to understand the pioneers' view of the economic program and how this program impacted their lives. A phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon. In this case, under the macro concept of black economic development, the researcher chose to interview members (on the micro-level) who were involved in the Nation of Islam's economic program. In a phenomenological study, it is important to understand several individuals common or shared experiences of a concept. This study also used semi-structured individual interviews. This style of interviewing was chosen because a specific list of questions, topics, and issues were comprised before the interviews took place. The questions ensured continuity with the questions and helped cover essential topics. The interview questions served as a

guide only, which allowed more questions to be asked freely, but it also resulted in more information appropriate to the general purpose and focus of the study. This is why it is called semi-structured---compiling the interview questions beforehand does ensure that crucial points are not missed (Mathie & Camozzi, 2005).

Significance of the Study

Given the dearth of information pertaining to the Nation of Islam's economic program, this study is significant because it adds to the movement's historiography. The voices of the pioneers missed the social scientist and historian's eye and this study gives first-hand accounts of how Elijah Muhammad's economic program benefitted those who were involved. In other words, it offers empirical evidence that enriches the existing body of knowledge on the Nation of Islam and the concept of black economic development.

The results of this study are significant because it revealed that Elijah Muhammad's economic program positively affected the pioneers' self-esteem and enhanced their quality of life. Results from this study also revealed that the pioneers gained practical, "real world" experience while involved in the movement's program. These same skills were sometimes employed in their own efforts to obtain economic security. According to Michael Stoll, black economic development programs also serve as a liberating strategy for blacks who are struggling economically. Other research studies pertaining to alleviating economic obstacles suggest that the creation of black businesses is crucial to the uplift of communities (Bates, 2006; Holzer, Raphael, & Stoll, 2004; Carter, Lacho, & Parker, 2005). Not only do black owned businesses help to foster pride and self-esteem among blacks, but the strategies they employ have practical implications. Therefore, this study is significant because it directly shows how Elijah Muhammad's economic program improved the life chances of the pioneers.

Nature of the Study

This study used a phenomenological approach to assess the pioneers' perceptions and experiences while active in Elijah Muhammad's economic program.

Phenomenology

A phenomenological study usually consists of 5 to 25 individuals (Creswell, 2007). For this study, the researcher chose to interview five individuals who were involved in the economic program. A phenomenological study asks 2 to 3 broad, but loaded questions to shed light on a particular concept or phenomenon. The overall research inquiries are: How did the program impact the pioneer? What was the pioneer's perception of Elijah Muhammad's economic program? What was the pioneer's experience while involved in the program? A criterion was established for this study. 1. Individuals must have been members of the Nation of Islam prior to 1975. 2. Individuals in this study must have been active participants in the economic program i.e. worked in the business establishments, on the farms, or within the temple structure.

The site in which the interviews took place for this study is Atlanta. Individual interviews were held in various places at the convenience of the interviewee. Thus, the individual interviews took place in the participant's home, work place, over the phone, and a temple or Mosque. The researcher had established ties with one pioneer during a previous research project involving the Nation of Islam. The pioneers in this study met the criterion and were more than willing to participate in the study. The researcher sought comprehensive responses pertaining to what they perceived and experienced in Muhammad's program as well as the impact the program had on their lives.

In addition to the interviews, other forms of data included primary sources i.e. newspaper from the time period including *Muhammad Speaks* and magazines. These sources of information provided context to the responses of the individual.

Data Collection and Methodology

The interviews were transcribed where significant statements, themes, quotes, sentences were highlighted to provide a thorough understanding of how Muhammad's economic program impacted them. Next "clusters of meaning" were developed from the significant statements and categorized into themes. After significant themes were highlighted, a description of what the participants experienced was generated. From this analysis, a fused description that captured the very "essence" of the pioneer's perception and experiences was revealed (Creswell, 2007).

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to gather the pioneers perceptions and experiences while involved in the economic program put forth by Elijah Muhammad. The overriding research questions were: How did the program impact the pioneer? What was the pioneer's perception of Elijah Muhammad's economic program? What was the pioneer's experience while involved in the program? Several follow-up questions were asked to ensure that comprehensive responses were given. The following questions were part of the interview guide.

1. What made you join the Nation of Islam? What appealed to you?
2. What were your duties while in the movement?
3. In what ways did you participate in the economic program?
4. How would you describe your financial situation at the time of your conversion?
5. Did working within the economic realm of the movement help you financially?

6. How would you describe your work ethic before and after you joined the Nation of Islam?
7. What lessons did you learn while employed in the Nation of Islam?
8. Did you feel used or taken advantage of?
9. Was Elijah Muhammad's economic program empowering to you?
10. What was your overall perception of this program?
11. Describe some of your positive and negative experiences while in the movement?
12. Are you familiar with the Three Year Economic/National Savings Plan? If so, what was your basic understanding of those plans?
13. Did you see progress take place within the movement? What evidence of progress did you see?

These questions were pertinent to the study. It helped the pioneers tell their story and share their experiences. The questions were asked in order to gain more insights into what has already been explored within the existing literature on Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam. For example, Lawrence Tyler argued that Muhammad's program succeeded because it incorporated the Protestant Ethic, which posits that hard work and thrift equals economic success (Tyler, 1966). In another study by E.U. Essien Udom, one of the conclusions was that black people joined the movement because they were in search of an identity separate from their oppressive past (Udom, 1962). Thus, some of the research questions were based from the literature. Other questions pertaining to their experiences were asked in order to fill the gaps within the existing body of literature. For example, questions regarding how the program impacted their economic lives were important.

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

Early studies on the Nation of Islam posit that black people were attracted to the movement because it helped them forge their own identity. Udom's *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America* offers a balanced narrative of the religious and economic aspects of the organization. He convincingly points out that black people flocked to the Nation of Islam because of Elijah Muhammad's insistence that they create a new identity and improve their status in society (Udom, 1962). This new identity involved changing one's name, religion, and economic status. Turner's *Islam in the African American Experience* explains that black people in America have been striving to forge their own identity during and after slavery. He posits that this signification is a "counter-conception to the hegemonic discourse of an oppressive majority community…it has enabled this community to achieve independence from the dominant culture (Turner, 1997 p. 46)." Lincoln's study, *The Black Muslims in America* also concurs with Udom and Turner's assessment. He mentions that the ultimate appeal of the appeal of the Nation of Islam was that it gave black people a chance to identify with a power formidable enough to surmount white domination in America (Lincoln, 1994). This concept of identity is presented in Chapters 4 and 5 of this study as the pioneers' explained why they joined the Nation of Islam.

This study also incorporates the Protestant Ethic[1]. While reviewing the literature, Tyler's study "The Protestant Ethic Among the Black Muslims" discuss how Elijah Muhammad incorporated a "black puritan ethic" in his religious and economic rhetoric. Tyler used Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic* in his framework. Weber posited that the Protestant's hard work and economic beliefs led them to success.

---

[1] Max Weber's theory, The Protestant Ethic has been applied to the Nation of Islam in several seminal studies including Lincoln (1961), Udom (1962) and Tyler (1966). This same theory was used as a lens to assess the pioneers' perception of and experiences in Elijah Muhammad's economic program.

> "Not leisure and enjoyment, but only activity serves to increase the glory of God, according to the definite manifestations of His will. Waste of time is thus the first and in principle the deadliest of sin. Loss of time through sociability, idle talk, luxury, even more sleep than is necessary for health…is worthy of absolute moral condemnation…Work hard in your calling (Weber, 2008 p. 157-159)."

The Protestants owned and produced resources and although religion may have influenced their work ethic, it was their hard work and thrift that allowed them to become economically independent (Tyler, 1966; Weber, 2008). These same concepts were used in assessing the pioneers' perceptions of and experiences in Elijah Muhammad's economic program.

Definitions

Black Nationalism: Black Nationalism in the United States exists as a critique of the European hegemonic tradition (Umoja, 2005). It entails collective consciousness among black people and the belief that they can live independent of whites and form their own separate national identity (Ogbar, 2005; Umoja, 2005). Black Nationalism also refers to black people's desire to control their own political organizations through the formation and preservation of their own cultural, economic, and social institutions (Thomas & Thomas, 1960). It also calls for pride and seeks unity that is racially, culturally, and territorially based (Bracey, Meier, Rudwick, 1970; Ogbar, 2005).

Black Capitalism: The literature did not point to a succinct definition of black capitalism. In fact many scholars have difficulty defining the term (Innis, 1969; Marable, 2000; Villemez & Beggs, 1984). Black capitalism calls for the creation of new jobs and economic development centers in impoverished black communities, especially urban areas. This concept also desires to transfer black businesses from "white to black control (Cross, 1974, p. 211)" and puts forth the

idea that black people can economically improve as a group through entrepreneurial strategies. In turn, these strategies can enhance the power of the whole group.

Black Economic Development: black economic development and black capitalism have been used interchangeably by several scholars. Some academics prefer to use the term Black economic development in place of Black capitalism. Tabb (1970) noted that at the 35th American Assembly in 1969, young black participants exclaimed that the "goal is not simply to get a greater share of what already exists" instead they called for "a new concept of American economic organization (p. 78)." In other words, the creation of black businesses should be designed specifically with black people in mind and also provide them with employment opportunities. Black economic development is the creation and the acquisition of capital instruments that will enable black people to maximize their economic interests (Innis, 1969; Villemez & Beggs, 1984). In this process, black people are able to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services to one another (Karenga, 2002).

Assumptions

In this study, the researcher assumed that the pioneers were familiar with Elijah Muhammad's economic agenda since they were part of the movement under his leadership. It was also assumed that these pioneers were incorporating some of the values that Muhammad stressed in his economic rhetoric.

Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study was to assess the perceptions and experiences of the pioneers who were involved in the economic program of the Nation of Islam as put forth by Elijah Muhammad. One limitation of this study is that not all of the pioneers interviewed still claim member-

ship to the Nation of Islam. Yet this limitation did not seem to hinder the data collection. Secondly, the results of this study cannot be generalized to every member who was involved in the economic program of Elijah Muhammad. Only five pioneers were interviewed for this study.

Summary

This chapter presented the problem black people in America have encountered in the area of economics. It mentions briefly how other black leaders such as Marcus Garvey and Booker T. Washington have put forth strategies to overcome this problem. The economic philosophy and program of Elijah Muhammad was introduced and discussed.

The significance of this study ties to the existing literature on the Nation of Islam. Few studies attempt to examine Elijah Muhammad's economic program through the voices of those who were directly involved in its operations. Thus, this chapter presented a method to begin filling this gap in the literature. Using a phenomenological approach, this study examined the pioneer's perceptions and experiences in Muhammad's economic program as well as the impact this program had on their lives. Nation of Islam scholars agree that there needs to me more studies on the Nation of Islam. For example, Lincoln stated "We need more studies about the voiceless people who want to heard in the councils of the world…if we hope to pass on to our children, a world in which there is reasonable hope for creative survival (Lincoln, 1994 p. xvii)."

Chapter 2 is a review of the literature. It details the method used in the literature search. It also reviews the literature pertaining to empirical studies on the Nation of Islam as well as how other black religious institutions act as economic agents. It also charts the discussion pertaining to black capitalism and black economic development and discusses any gaps found.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to gather the pioneer's perception and experiences in Elijah Muhammad's economic program as well as the impact it had on their lives. The literature review in this section delves into the historical context within which the Nation of Islam should be understood. Within this review, the current gaps found are discussed. This chapter begins with a brief synopsis of the literature search.

Literature Search

A myriad of scholarly monographs and articles were used in the literature search. Using Georgia State University's database, these sources were found on search engines such as EBSCOhost, JSTOR, ProQuest, Project MUSE and *Review of the Black Political Economy*. The information retrieved helped frame this study. Keywords such as Elijah Muhammad, Nation of Islam, black economic development, black capitalism, religion and economic development, and community economic development were used in the search. Using these keywords identified many articles and books pertaining to Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam with references to his economic program.

To retrieve more relevant articles, advanced searches were used on EBSCOhost and ProQuest where multiple keywords were used within one search. For example, the keywords, community economic development, religion, and African American economic development were used in one search. Using such a combination of words led to more empirical articles concerning how religious institutions can act as economic agents in advancing poor, urban, black communities. Overall, the keywords used in the literature search led to hundreds of sources but only a limited number were relevant to this study. For example, on JSTOR, the keyword Elijah Muham-

mad yielded 788 articles, approximately 10 were used in this study. The advanced search yielded fewer articles, but they were much more relevant to this study.

Overview of the Literature Review

The information retrieved from the articles and monographs primarily discusses the life experiences of Elijah Muhammad from birth till his death in 1975 (Clegg, 1997, Evanzz, 1999). Other studies capture the religious rhetoric of Muhammad and his eschatological beliefs (Lee, 1996) while other researchers are concerned with the culture of the movement, its organizational structure, the Muslim work ethic, and its appeal to black people in America (Beynon, 1938; Lincoln, 1994; Mamiya, 1982; Tyler, 1966; Udom, 1962).

Other studies related to black economic development reveal that the economic strategies put forth by religious institutions can help transform black communities in need of economic reform (Bates, 2006; Carter et al., 2005). These studies also include past Black Nationalist and Islamic movements such as the Moorish Science Temple and the Universal Negro Improvement Association. While these studies show that black economic initiatives are beneficial to blacks, other researchers have their doubts. Some scholars posit that black economic development actually hurt black people because black entrepreneurs are only concerned with their own enrichment and exploiting poorer people (Marable, 2000; Shipp, 1996; Villemez & Beggs, 1984).

Historical Overview

The historical overview is discussed in three sections. The first section discusses empirical studies on Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam. It details why black people in the United States converted to Islam and joined the organization and also charts how scholars have discussed Elijah Muhammad's economic program. The second section examines how African

American religious institutions can act as economic agents for the uplift of poor urban communities. It also provides recommendations on the type of studies needed to gain more insights into black economic development initiatives. The third section briefly entertains the debate on black capitalism and black economic development. Do the economic strategies put forth by various leaders actually help uplift black people's lives? This is the overriding question for the third section. Various scholars offer their opinion.

Empirical Studies on the Nation of Islam

Few studies attempt to examine Elijah Muhammad's economic program through the voices of those directly involved (Beynon, 1938; Lincoln, 1994; Udom, 1962). Early literature on the Nation of Islam points to three major scholars, Beynon, Lincoln, and Udom. Beynon's study entitled "The Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants," appeared in 1938 and was the first attempt to capture the movement created by Wallace Fard Muhammad. Beynon describes the formation of the Nation of Islam and the reason why so many blacks during the 1930s found the movement attractive. Using first-hand accounts from the movement's earliest converts, Beynon remarkably wrote the institutional history of the Nation of Islam without losing sight of the people who gave shape to it. For example, he described how one man by the name of Challar Sharieff was so enamored by Fard Muhammad's teachings that he left the Baptist church to join the Nation of Islam. Beynon argues that black people during this time period were disillusioned with the system of racism in the United States. Thus, Wallace Fard Muhammad's focus on racial solidarity and his unique brand of Islam was the ultimate appeal. Since the movement at this time was in its infancy, Beynon most likely did not see economic uplift as a primary goal of the movement.

In 1961, one of the first comprehensive studies on the Nation of Islam was published. Lincoln's *The Black Muslims in America*, not only explained why African Americans joined the movement. He shares that it was Muhammad's focus on solidarity that propelled the movement forward rather than the religious aspects. Within this case study, the members involved in the Nation of Islam were interviewed primarily on issues concerning their views on the religious teachings of Elijah Muhammad. In the area of economics, Lincoln acknowledges Muhammad's comprehensive understanding of how to thrive in a racist capitalist system. In addition to the discussion about the various businesses owned and operated by the movement, Lincoln noted that the members were happy to work within the movement and secured jobs more easily. Generally, one can conclude that Muhammad's economic program was beneficial and empowering from Lincoln's study. However, the personal testimonies from the members would enrich the study.

Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America is an enrichment of Lincoln's study. Udom (1962) situates the Nation of Islam within the larger context of Black Nationalism positing that it grew out of the tense racial climates of the nineteenth century and continued to expand in the early to mid twentieth century as white racism reached its apex. It is out of these conditions that the separatist agenda of black movements came forth. The Nation of Islam follows a unique path of Black Nationalist movements. Noble Drew Ali's Moorish Science Temple and Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association were preceding Black Nationalists movements.

Udom also posits that the movement gave black people in America an identity of their own, which increased their self-esteem. Since black people were alienated from Africa and endured over four centuries of chattel slavery and along with it humiliation, an inferiority complex developed. Udom asserts that Elijah Muhammad's rhetoric sought to reverse this by teaching

black people that they were the "righteous people" while whites were the antithesis of this. "Knowledge of one's identity, one's self, nation, religion and god is considered the true meaning of Resurrection (Udom, 1962, p. 22)."

In the area of economics, Udom notes that Muhammad's economic philosophy is inextricably linked with his religious teachings. Various businesses were opened due to Muhammad's system of communalism---a system where members voluntarily give a portion of their income for the establishment of business enterprises. These alms were not individual shares (Udom, 1962). The movement owned the businesses collectively and it was their work ethic that led to economic prosperity. Udom's study does not focus on the economic program of the Nation of Islam, but examines other reasons blacks joined the organization.

The Muslim work ethic has attracted the attention of other scholars. Tyler (1966) examined Muhammad's economic ideology as an extension of Max Weber's The *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Tyler insists that Muhammad's focus on thrift, saving money, and working hard is paramount in alleviating black economic deprivation: "It is in this area that the Black Muslim movement has most benefitted its members (p.10.)" However, Tyler does not delve into how the movement has benefitted the members involved.

Mamiya's (1982) study on the transformation of the Nation of Islam after the demise of Elijah Muhammad reveals that it was Muhammad's use of the "Black Puritan Ethic" in his economic blueprint that contributed to the overall success of the program. Muhammad insisted that blacks avoid intoxicating products i.e. tobacco, work hard, save money, and spend only according to one's income. Through his interviews, Mamiya reveals that this "puritan ethic" consequently changed lower-class blacks into middle-class citizens, therefore paving the way for blacks to accept traditional or Sunni Islam.

Moreover, the Muslim work ethic is evident in Sodiq's (1994) study on the history of Islam among blacks in Richmond, Virginia. In 1955, Nation of Islam Temple # 24 was established. All members of Richmond Satellite Ancient Ethiopian Spiritual Church of Christ converted to the Nation of Islam under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad. Using first-hand accounts from the participants, Sodiq notes that immediately after the church became Nation of Islam Temple # 24, some members changed their names to an Arabic one and an economic program was set up where a few businesses were established. To raise funds, the Muslim women sold wholesome foods. In order to support their families and help the temple, the men learned entrepreneurial skills. The temple later established the University of Islam, which was a school that prepared young boys and girls for adulthood. Specifically, the school incorporated Elijah Muhammad's teachings along with basic subjects such as English and mathematics. After the death of Muhammad, division and factionalism destroyed the temple and it was converted back into a church under new leadership. However, it is important to note that the temple prior to 1975 was economically self- sustaining and enriched the member's lives.

A masterpiece on the life experiences of Elijah Muhammad is Clegg's (1997) monograph, *An Original Man*. Besides the extensive amount of research exhibited in this text, this book is essential to understanding some of the most fundamental and controversial aspects of the movement. While it is not solely focused on Muhammad's religious ideology or his economic program, it is however, a balanced combination of both. It details why Elijah Muhammad and other blacks were attracted to the movement and why he was successful as its leader. The Nation of Islam was a successful Black Nationalist organization under Muhammad's leadership.

In accord, Turner (1997) provides a rich history of Black Nationalist organizations in America. He discussed the Moorish Science Temple, the Universal Negro Improvement Associa-

tion, and the Nation of Islam. Turner posits that these movements gave black people an identity separate from their oppressive past. Each organization had an impact on the consciousness of American blacks. Similar to Udom's study, Turner's work brings forth the issue of *signification*, which is a concept that concerns naming and identity. Signification was an important component of Islam in America. For example, in 1913, Noble Drew Ali, founder of the Moorish Science Temple declared that "the name means everything." He urged black people to change their name and form a new identity under the banner of Islam. Elijah Muhammad did the same in the 1930s after joining the Nation of Islam.

Evanzz's (1999) study chronicles Elijah Muhammad's life mainly using primary documents such as FBI files and other declassified government documents. There are few instances where the economic aspects of the movement come through; however, Muhammad's economic development strategy is undermined in the text. After reading this work, it is difficult to estimate that Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam advanced an economic program. Overall, this study lacks balance as Evanzz places too much emphasis on government documents which takes away from the movements' primary goals.

What lacks in Evanzz study is recaptured in Clegg's (1996) study on the Nation of Islam from 1946-1954. It details the economic agenda of the movement. Similar to Tyler's (1966) study, the Muslims' work ethic helped the movement flourish economically. Hard work and thrift was emphasized. At many instances, the economic uplift of the movement overshadowed the religious rhetoric during these years. The success of Muhammad's economic program can be attributed to the contributions made by the members who worked within and outside the movement. The latter portion of this study discusses why Malcolm X joined the movement, which also

opens a window into why other black people sought refuge into the Nation of Islam. It was Muhammad's religious and economic teachings that served as its primary appeal.

Allen's (1996) study on the movement is in alignment with Clegg's (1996) study. Allen not only discuss the zenith years of the organization's economic development (1958-1975), but he also delves deeper into the rhetoric of the movement citing that Wallace Fard Muhammad's version of Islam was geared towards black people's self-improvement on the spiritual, mental, and physical level. For example, Wallace Fard taught black people that they were God's chosen people and Islam was the only way they could receive salvation. This study also discusses the continuing evolution of movement post-Elijah citing the ideological and practical shifts that took place.

Wright (1994-1995) uses the rhetoric and works of Elijah Muhammad to describe how Islam in black America is authentic and was a response to white America's political thought and practices. By urging blacks to separate from whites and seek knowledge of self under the banner of Islam makes the Nation of Islam an authentic organization because it offered a remedy to the social, political, and economic adversities facing black people. Wright also details Muhammad's philosophy about white people being devils. This type of teaching, according to both Turner (1997) and Wright was part of black people's psychological cleansing from inferior thinking. Similarly, Jackson's (2005) study on Islam in black America concurs with Wright's overall assessment as he notes that Black Nationalist institutions were created to counter the European establishment. Both studies see Islam among black people in America as a viable and justifiable alternative.

Overall, the studies on the Nation of Islam pertain to why black people joined the movement and how the movement gave black Americans a renewed identity. Although the literature

posits that the movement helped black people in America on a spiritual, social, and economic level, it does not delve into some of the member's perceptions and experiences while involved in the economic program of Elijah Muhammad.

African American Religious Institutions as Economic Agents

Like the Nation of Islam, the black church arose out of intense racial climate in America (Bracey, Meier, Rudwick, 1970). Since blacks felt that that they were treated unfairly as there was little to no room for upward mobility in white churches, they set out to form their own church. Thus, the African Methodist Episcopal Church was established in 1789. Early on, issues pertaining to economics became important because outside help was limited when it came to sustaining black religious institutions. Bishop Daniel A. Payne shared that black people were "compelled to support their own institutions." He exclaimed, "Our members have learned to economize and to forecast as they never could or would (p. 12)." Payne was undoubtedly happy that black people could separate from the white church and be self-sustaining. Not only were blacks satisfied with the church's economic progress but they were happy that the teachings were culturally centered in their experiences. The black church was the only way some black people survived slavery and Reconstruction.

During Reconstruction, black people wanted to exercise their basic rights of citizenship. However, there were limitations to their freedom. They could not own land or secure stable employment. These hindrances did not deter the formerly enslaved from creating unique avenues in order to renew their lives. While the black church was central in the quest for freedom, Islam was also introduced an alternative. In the early twentieth century, Black Nationalist and Islamic organizations sprung up. Noble Drew Ali, who founded the Moorish Science Temple of America (MSTA) in 1913, was convinced that Islam lacked the racial prejudice found in Christianity

(Turner, 1997). He believed that black people should disconnect entirely from their past. He declared that blacks were Moors or Moabites. Morocco was viewed as the "promised" land. The purpose of the movement was to uplift "fallen humanity and teach those things necessary to make our members better citizens (Ali, 1928)."

Even though Noble Drew Ali's ideologies may have seemed difficult to follow, an astounding number of black people in America were attracted to his rhetoric (Turner, 1997). In the 1920s, the movement had a large membership base and counted many organized temples in Detroit, Chicago, Pittsburg, New York, and Philadelphia (Turner, 1997). Drew Ali also advanced economic strategies as a drawing card for blacks to join his movement. He insisted that "our men, women, and children should be taught to believe in the capacity of our group to succeed in business in spite of trials and failures of some of them (McCloud, 1995, p. 17)." The MSTA opened a few business enterprises. One had an estimated fortune of $36,000. The movement declined in the late 1920s as conflict over leadership occurred. Drew Ali's death in 1929 was a major blow to the movement. The circumstances surrounding his death remains a mystery, but some sources insist he died of complications resulting from police beatings sustained during his arrest for the alleged murder of one of his adversaries.

Another prominent Black Nationalist organization which began a few years after the MSTA was the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) founded by Marcus Garvey. Although the UNIA was established in Jamaica in 1914, it began in the United States in 1917. Garvey was attracted to Booker T. Washington's philosophy of entrepreneurial advancement. However, he felt that Washington's plan did not promote black solidarity and group advancement (Carter, 2002). Part of Garvey's strategy was to create a mass-based movement employing Washington's economic method.

Garvey also connected the struggle of blacks in America with people of color abroad and Africa was considered black people's ancestral home. "Africa for the Africans" became the movement's slogan. At the same time, Garvey used religion to attract his followers. Thus, he founded the African Orthodox Church and chose bishops that preached vigorously against the concept that god was white. This type of teaching was most likely influenced by his mentor Duse Mohammed Ali, who worked at the *African Times and Orient Review* in London (Geiss, 1969). Some of Garvey's teaching also had Islamic undertones.

Like Washington, Garvey exclaimed that blacks must start from the bottom up by working hard and being thrifty in order to economically advance. He stated "No success ever came from the top, it is always from the bottom up (Carter, 2002)." In addition, Garvey saw hope and future in capitalism. Industry and commerce were the keys to black economic success. He observed that nations' advance when businesses are plentiful. People become employed and can live comfortable lives. Garvey sought to do the same for black people. Hence, a string of businesses were established and provided many jobs to blacks looking to improve economically. These businesses included the Negro Factories Corporation and the *Negro World* newspaper. Garvey's largest and most ambitious economic venture was the Black Star Line, a shipping company that transported goods such as produce between the United States, Central and South America, and Africa.

Garvey's capitalist strategies did not win the hearts of some influential blacks. For example, Although W.E.B DuBois advocated black economic development, he viewed Garvey as a man who lacked sound economic skills. Corruption and mismanagement overcame the Black Star Line and it declined. Following this economic blow, the federal government charged Gar-

vey with mail fraud in 1923. In 1927, he was deported back to Jamaica by the order of President Coolidge (Rogers, 1955).

Although Garvey's UNIA collapsed with his deportation, his economic development strategies provided a foundation for future black economic oriented institutions (Carter, 2002). Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam as well as the economic strategies put forth by African American religious institutions resembles the path paved by Marcus Garvey. The black church has and still occupies a meaningful space in black communities. In many ways, though, the contemporary black church generally differs from the Black Nationalist movements discussed in that it does not seek a separate space for black people to operate in---it chooses to operate within the confines of society. But the events that propelled its existence give the black church nationalist features (Udom, 1962). This is especially true given that the black church in the nineteenth century championed separatism as a way to offset white supremacy.

There have been studies that examine how contemporary black religious institutions help advance the lives of African Americans. Leon Sullivan (1968) wrote about his attempt to alleviate the economic problems black people faced. He was pastor of Zion Baptist Church in Philadelphia during the 1960s. He became frustrated over the high instances of poverty in the inner cities where a significant number of black people resided. To him, the root of this problem was just as much economic as it was racial. Thus, he embarked on a road to "Racial economic emancipation (p. 358)." Sullivan founded the Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America (OIC) in 1964. It was the first economic development initiative in Philadelphia geared towards helping poor blacks. By 1968, over five thousand men and women, including whites who were either underemployed or unemployed found productive jobs because they trained at OIC. Even

though many of these people did not earn a high school diploma, the training program offered by OIC improved their life chances.

Simms (2000) study on the African American church shows how the institution continually helps disadvantaged groups in modern times. Aware of the class divisions that exist in black communities, Simms show how middle class people helped close the economic gap that exist between the poor and the rich. Using Lincoln and Mamiya's (1990) study on black Christians, he noted that the working and middle class blacks make up the membership base in seven historic black denominations and that the clergy had a difficult time appealing to the poor. To remedy this problem, the church offered social services such as food pantries and support groups for drug abusers. In addition, a study of the economic initiatives in Treme reported that St. Peter Claver Catholic Church offered several services to indigent populations such as a wellness center, and test prep courses as a means of empowerment. Participants who utilized the services offered by this church were more likely to find jobs (Carter, et al., 2005).

Other studies show that the services offered by the black religious institutions can increase people's commitment to the church. For example, Wielhouwer (2004) study examined black people's religious commitment to the church. Using data from the 1979-1980 National Survey of Black Americans, Wielhouwer found that discipleship and ministry influenced black people's commitment to religious institutions because they help economically. With regards to ministry and its economic impact, the sample shared that the church helps them financially as well as provide physical assistance and care. This service in turn increases the member's commitment to the church as the church becomes a support system during times of need.

The black church has also been a primary site for community solidarity. Both church members and non-members are able to come together to triumph over various adversities. This is

just one feature of how the black religious institutions can be self-sustaining (Simms, 2000). Historically black religious organizations have utilized the concept of self-help. In her study, Littlefield (2005) notes that the black church was formed because the system of racial oppression prevented interracial worship and thus, it advocated economic independence and employed the concept of self-help as liberation strategy for black communities.

Notable African Americans leaders such as Frederick Douglass and DuBois were advocates of the self-help concept, a value system which demands that victims of oppression change their circumstances (McKeen, 2002; Littlefield, 2005). McKeen's (2002) study delves deeply into the concept of self-help in African American thought. Using the ideologies of Douglass and DuBois, she argues that both leaders urged black people to believe that they could progress despite the opposition facing them i.e. racism and Jim Crow. Even though they were victims of such abhorrence, they could come together to alleviate their social, political, and economic problems.

The overriding theme in this section is that African American religious institutions can become positive agents in the quest for economic liberation. But much more remains to be said as to how black religious institutions can act as an economic driving force in underserved communities. More empirical research is needed in this area (Littlefield, 2005).

Black Economic Development: Does it Help or Harm?

A debate about the benefits and ills of black economic development strategies became apparent while reviewing the literature. The historical economic subjugation of black Americans is no secret. Many African American leaders including W.E.B DuBois, Booker T. Washington, Marcus Garvey, and Elijah Muhammad put forth various economic strategies to elevate the sta-

tus of blacks. However, some scholars disagree with the separatist economic ideology black leaders have put forth throughout the twentieth century.

Marable (2000) mainly argues that the ultimate goal of black entrepreneurs is to make profits, no more, no less and that they uphold the belief that anyone can make it in society using the capitalist system. Another scholar who concurs with this assessment include Sigmund Shipp (1996), an economist who posits that black leaders such as Booker T. Washington, who rely on business ownership to provide a means for advancement represents the classic capitalistic approach to economic development. Instead, Shipp believes leaders need to look at the Mondragon cooperative as a model for advancement because it is a successful model used in Spain where the people share responsibility for its management. Currently most of the employees (approximately 90,000) work in the Basque country.

Others argue that black capitalism has a tendency to exploit other blacks. However, there are fine lines of distinction regarding contemporary understandings of black economic development. Villemez and Beggs (1984) argue that black capitalism can be viewed in two separate ways. One is those advocating an individual economic approach where the goal is to make profits. The other involves a more collective economic approach where an individual could set up a business and employ other people who need jobs. Elijah Muhammad advanced the collective strategy. At the same time, he wanted individuals to feel empowered and become economically self-sufficient.

Conversely, Hutchinson (1992) asserts that self-help and black capitalism alone cannot remedy the problems facing black people in America and Black Nationalism can only go so far. He states “What are the limits of race loyalty (p. 18)?” His main point is that although black businessmen urge black people to “buy black,” the businesses in turn are not doing much to help

the black consumer. Even though welfare programs have been looked down upon, Hutchinson believes that only the federal government can build up black communities. The problems of poverty, drugs, crime, and racism are far too great for the black economic development initiatives that have been put forth. He argues that both economic and political solutions are needed.

With regards to the Black Nationalist ideology put forth by the Nation of Islam, Anderson (1993) posit that Elijah Muhammad's economic doctrine was limited in breadth and scope to its practical applications to all blacks in the United States. He further poses that Elijah Muhammad's economic initiatives only did well to serve the purpose of the Nation of Islam and argue that "Black conservatives offer no new, clear, and incisive economic ideology that the masses of African Americans adhere to that may resolve socioeconomic racial disparities (p. 229)." The argument here is that black capitalism has a tendency to widen class divisions in black communities---whenever one succeeds, there is another that fails. While Anderson's criticism is indeed valid, he also agrees that black capitalism has advantages when it comes to elevating black communities: "There are tens of thousands of relatively small Black businesses employing, for the most part, millions of African American workers and professional staff members. Historically, Black-owned and operated banks, savings and loan associations, and insurance companies have assisted African Americans (p. 239)." Summarily, more research is needed to examine the benefits and detriment of black economic development initiatives.

Gap in the Literature

There were two gaps identified within the literature review. The first is that little attention is paid to Elijah Muhammad's economic philosophy and program. Most studies briefly mention Muhammad's economic strategy and his ventures. Secondly and most importantly is that the voices of those who directly participated in the economic program does not permeate the litera-

ture. In other words: *How did this program benefit the pioneers?* Recommendations from the literature also reveal the need to capture the pioneers perceptions and experiences of the Elijah Muhammad's economic program. For example, Lincoln (1994) indicated that more studies are needed on the black Muslims if there is to be a thorough understanding of how black people have creatively survived atrocious situations and experiences. Furthermore, there is a lack of information on the role of black religious institutions as economic agents. Future research should examine the connection between religion and economic development (Littlefield 2005; Lacho et al, 2005). This study attempts to fulfill these gaps.

Conclusion

Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam was overall beneficial to its members because it gave them a new identity under the banner of Islam (Beynon, 1938; Lincoln, 1994; Udom, 1962). The Islam Wallace Fard Muhammad taught black people in America improved their self-esteem. The movement's rhetoric taught black people that they were the righteous and god's preferred choice of people (Jackson, 2005; Turner, 1997; Wright, 1994-1995).

The economic program was empowering because many adherents became employed by the movement or easily found employment because they adhered to Muhammad's stance on being upright, respectful, and hard working. Summarily, Muhammad's program was viewed as successful as some scholars measured it through the use of the "Protestant Ethic." They noted the accumulation of material wealth as a sign of economic progress (Mamiya, 1982; Sodiq, 1994; Tyler, 1966).

Studies that examine African American religious institutions as economic agents reveal that the economic development initiatives they put forth can improve black people's life chances as they help people find jobs, provide food, and offer financial assistance to those who need it

(Littlefield, 2005; Simms, 2000; Wielhower, 2004). Black religious institutions also increase foster important relationship with people in the greater community as services are open to anyone in need and not necessarily members of that institution (Simms, 2000).

Other scholars exposed the ills of black capitalism and its ability to exploit people and widen class divisions in black communities (Anderson, 1993; Marable, 2000; Hutchinson, 2001; Shipp, 1996). What is not fully known in the literature is the pioneers' perceptions of and experience in Muhammad's economic program and the impact the program had on their lives. Insight into how individuals involved in the movement perceived and experienced the economic program represents a window into how the program was successful or unsuccessful and adds to the discussion on black economic development.

Summary

This chapter discussed the literature search and provided a brief overview of the literature review. Three key areas were discussed: empirical studies on Elijah Muhammad and Nation of Islam (Beynon, 1938; Lincoln, 1961 & 1994; Udom, 1962), African American religious institutions as economic agents (Littlefield, 2005; Sullivan, 1968; Wielhower, 2004), and the question of how black economic development initiatives can help and hurt black communities (Hutchinson, 2001; Marable, 2000; Shipp, 1996).

The gaps identified in this study show the reason for this study. To reiterate, the literature does not lend itself to the voices of the pioneers involved in Elijah Muhammad's economic program. Exploring how the economic program benefitted the members adds to the literature on the three major sections that characterize the literature review. More studies are needed on the Nation of Islam and the role religion plays in economically uplifting disadvantaged people's lives. This in turn will reveal more information on the viability of black economic initiatives.

Chapter 3 reveals the research design used for this study. It details why a phenomenological approach was used and discusses the validity and reliability of this study. The rationale and procedures for the study is discussed.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand the pioneers' perceptions of and experiences in Elijah Muhammad's economic program and how the program impacted their lives. As seen in Chapter 2, there have not been many studies capturing the stories of those involved in the Nation of Islam's economic program. This study seeks to fill this void in the literature.

This chapter describes the features of a qualitative study and more specifically, a phenomenological study. This chapter also details the research method and design, the sample population, data collection procedures, and the validity and reliability of the results. Assumptions and biases are also entertained.

Research Design and Method

As previously mentioned, the personal stories of the pioneers involved in Elijah Muhammad's economic program are not apparent in the literature. Since this is the case, a qualitative study was the most appropriate because it interprets the perspectives of the sample population. Qualitative studies compel the researcher to not only hear, but listen to the participants words, observe actions and expressions during the interview. Through this, meaningful data that provides a rich context is discovered (Creswell, 2007; "Qualitative Paradigm"). The study goes beyond broad generalizations. One phrase could have major implications. Unlike quantitative studies that convert data and observations into mathematical concepts such as percentages and decimals, qualitative studies delve into the essence of a concept or a particular occurrence or experience.

Within this qualitative study, a phenomenological approach was used. Phenomenological studies describe the meaning of a concept or phenomenon for several individuals. The common

or shared experience of a specific group of people is the most important part of phenomenology. The other four approaches suggested by Creswell (2007) that includes narrative, ethnography, grounded theory and case study were considered. The narrative study focuses on the experiences of one individual while a grounded theory is concerned with developing a new theory or concept. Rather than generate a new theory, an understanding how the economic program benefitted the pioneers took precedence. Neither a large sample population nor a bounded system was needed to capture the voices of the pioneers. These features are indicative for ethnographic and case studies (Creswell, 2007). Hence, a phenomenological method was the most appropriate because it usually consists of five to twenty-five people. The people chosen are interviewed because they shed light on a particular phenomenon or experience.

Population and Sample Selection

Five pioneers who were registered members of the Nation of Islam prior to 1975 in Atlanta, GA were interviewed in this study. This study used a purposive sampling method. A specific predefined group was selected prior to carrying out the study. The participants chosen for this study had a sizeable amount of knowledge that pertained to this study (Creswell, 2007; Trochim & Donnelly, 2007). Only they could best convey their perceptions of and experiences in Elijah Muhammad's economic program. This study had two criteria. 1. Individual's must have been members of the Nation of Islam prior to 1975. 2. Individuals in this study must have been active participants in the economic program i.e. worked in the business establishments, on the farms, or within the temple structure.

Sampling Procedure

Recruitment was relatively easy since a communication network was set up by one pioneer prior to this study. Phone calls were made and emails were sent to potential participants before the five individuals were selected. A homogenous group was sought, for example, all pioneers had met the criteria. Even though one pioneer no longer claimed allegiance to the Nation of Islam and is now with the Sunni community, he was more than willing to share his perception of the program. Only one pioneer was a member of a current Nation of Islam Mosque and three still believed in the teachings of Elijah Muhammad but was not part of any major religious organization, but considered themselves Muslims.

It is important to emphasize that the participants in this study had more similarities than differences because diversity can reduce the commonalities between individuals who shared a particular experience (Creswell, 2007): "The more diverse the characteristics of the individuals, the more difficult it will be for the researcher to find common experiences, themes, and the overall essence of the experience for all participants (p. 122)."

The interviews took place at locations chosen by the pioneers. Homes, work offices, and restaurants were sites where the interview was conducted. Due to scheduling conflicts, one pioneer was interviewed over the phone, but the conversation was still recorded and transcribed verbatim. Prior to conducting the interviews, the participants signed an informed consent form. They were ensured that all the information was confidential.

This study was semi-structured. A specific list of questions, topics, and issues were comprised before the interviews took place. This ensured continuity with the questions and topic. The questions served as a guide related to the overall purpose of the study. However, more questions could be added that related to the overall purpose (Mathie & Camozzi, 2005).

Data Collection and Analysis

The interviews were transcribed and significant statements, themes, quotes, sentences were highlighted to provide a thorough understanding of how Muhammad's economic program impacted them. "Clusters of meaning" were extracted from the significant statements and categorized into themes. After significant themes were highlighted, a description of what the participants experienced was generated. From this analysis, a fused description that captured the pioneers' perceptions and experiences was revealed. The data analysis is described in six steps:

- A description of the personal experiences of the concept or phenomenon is fleshed out.
- A list of significant statements is developed pertaining to the concept or phenomenon.
- Group the significant statements into larger "meaning units" or themes
- Write a description of what the participants experienced. This is the "textural description
- Write a description of how the experience happened.
- Write a composite description fusing both the meaning and textural description (Creswell, 2007).

It is important to note that significant themes connected to points discussed in the review of the literature. Notes were taken and kept in a case data.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity complement each other. In qualitative studies, reliability concerns the repeatability of a measure. In other words, the measure is the same regardless of how many times it is repeated. This is more applicable to quantitative studies. Reliability in qualitative studies cannot be accurately assessed. According to Trochim and Donnelly (2007) reliability cannot be computed, but the results from a study can have an *estimated* true value. Reliability can be

achieved in several ways. For example, having comprehensive field notes and transcribing the accounts verbatim ensures that the results of a study are reliable. Further measures can also be taken. For example, after recording the interviews, follow-up phone calls were made with the pioneers to ensure that the interpretations were accurate. Reliability also shows rigor. Was the study thorough? This is the underlying question (Creswell, 2007; Golafshani, 2003; Trochim & Donnelly, 2007).

Validity refers to the overall success of the study. Did the researcher measure what he or she set out to measure? This is the driving question concerning validity. It evaluates the approximate truth of conclusions (Golafshani, 2003; Trochim & Donnelly, 2007).

Internal Validity

Internal validity measures the cause and effects of relationships among the sample population. Can the pioneer's story concerning the impact Muhammad's program had on their life be solely attributed to this program? What other factors could have influenced the pioneer's perception and experience while in the economic program? In order to achieve internal validity, one must account for the events that can affect the final outcome. While interviewing the participants in this study, extra steps were taken to ensure that the assumptions made did not influence the pioneer's testimony. For example, the literature generally reveals that Elijah Muhammad's program was beneficial to those involved (Beynon, 1938; Lincoln, 1961; Udom, 1962). At the same time, there are criticisms of Muhammad's economic development strategy (Hutchinson, 2001; Marable, 2000). During the interviews, the researcher's biases and assumptions were put aside; therefore the pioneers could tell a balanced account without the researcher's assumptions influencing their testimony. This cut down on internal validity threats.

External Validity

To reiterate from Chapter 1, external validity is related to generalizing. It "refers to the approximate truth of conclusions that involve generalizations (Trochim & Donnelly, 2007 p. 132)." External validity measures if the results of a study can hold true for other people in the target population rather than the ones included in the sample (Trochim & Donnelly, 2007). In this study, the responses from the pioneers are not reflective of what all members felt during Elijah Muhammad's tenure as leader of the movement. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized and is limited to the five individuals in the sample. This study does attempt to fill the gaps in the historiography of the Nation of Islam as it pertains to the organization's economic program and how it impacted the members involved. Results reveal that the pioneers' perceptions of and experiences in Muhammad's economic program was positive and empowering.

Summary

This chapter discussed the research method and design of the study. The sample population selection, data collection procedures, and the validity and reliability of the study were revealed. Chapter 4 concerns the findings of this study. A comprehensive overview of each pioneer is detailed as well as their perception of and experience in Elijah Muhammad's economic program.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to gather the perceptions and experiences of the pioneers who were involved in Elijah Muhammad's economic program as well as how the program impacted their lives. The overall research questions were: How did the program impact the pioneer? What was the pioneer's perception of Elijah Muhammad's economic program? What was the pioneer's experience while involved in the program? Follow up questions were asked to ensure that comprehensive responses were given. Subsequent research questions for this study are as follows:

1. What made you join the Nation of Islam? What appealed to you?
2. What were your duties while in the movement?
3. In what ways did you participate in the economic program?
4. How would you describe your financial situation at the time of your conversion?
5. Did working within the economic realm of the movement help you financially?
6. How would you describe your work ethic before and after you joined the Nation of Islam?
7. What lessons did you learn while employed in the Nation of Islam?
8. Did you feel used or taken advantage of?
9. Was Elijah Muhammad's economic program empowering to you?
10. What was your overall perception of this program?
11. Describe some of your positive and negative experiences while in the movement?
12. Are you familiar with the Three Year Economic/National Savings Plan? If so, what was your basic understanding of those plans?

13. Did you see progress take place within the movement? What evidence of progress did you see?

These questions were important to the study. The pioneers told their stories and shared their experiences. The questions were asked to enrich the body of literature pertaining to Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam as well as add to the discussion on black economic development.

Creswell's (2007) phenomenological approach was used to analyze the data. Face to face interviews were conducted with four of the pioneers; one interview was recorded by phone. All interviews were transcribed verbatim. Significant themes, statements, and sentences were derived from each transcript. The meanings of the significant statements were transformed into clusters of meaning and significant themes. The results from the themes were then put into context to provide a comprehensive and exhaustive description of what the participants perceived and experienced in Elijah Muhammad's economic program.

This chapter presents the findings from the study. Three sections characterize this chapter. The first section presents a description of the five pioneers. Each pioneer's name is under a pseudonym to protect their identity. Data from the individual interviews is presented in the second portion. The final section is an overall summary of the chapter.

The Pioneers

Five black men who currently live and work in Atlanta, GA were participants in this study. All five men or pioneers were interviewed individually. The pioneers age range from 58-78 years of age. Raymond is the oldest and Shemar is youngest. All pioneers involved in this study met the two criteria. 1. Participants must have been members of the Nation of Islam prior to 1975. 2. Individuals in this study must have been active in Elijah Muhammad's the economic

program i.e. worked in the business establishments, on the farms, or within the temple structure. Table 1 is an overview of the pioneer's current profiles.

Table 1: Overview of Pioneers Information

Participants	Age	Gender	Birthplace	Religious Affiliation	Currently Attends Mosque/Temple	Level of Education
Raymond	78	Male	Atlanta, GA	Nation of Islam	Yes	High School
Hakeem	63	Male	Atlanta, GA	Nation of Islam	No	College Degree
Willis	62	Male	Atlanta, GA	Nation of Islam	No	No High School Diploma
Joseph	59	Male	Atlanta, GA	Sunni Islam	Yes	High School
Shemar	58	Male	Atlanta, GA	Nation of Islam	No	High School

The following is a comprehensive description of each pioneer starting with Raymond. Further explanation of certain terms and direct quotes are used when necessary.

Raymond: Raymond is 78 years old. He is currently a member of Mosque # 15 in Atlanta, GA under the auspices of Minister Louis Farrakhan. He shared that he first heard Elijah Muhammad's teachings in 1953 while residing in Detroit, Michigan. In 1954, he moved and lived briefly in New York and then moved to California. He admitted that he loved traveling during the 1950s. "I considered myself in those days a world traveler and I wanted to see everything and I wanted to get out of the south anyway. I had tried Detroit and New York and I did not find those places satisfactory." While in California he searched for Elijah Muhammad's temple, but was unable to find one. When he decided to come back to Atlanta in 1955, he became a devoted member to the Nation of Islam. Although he joined the movement in 1955, he did not receive his X until the early part of 1957. According to Raymond and the organization's teachings, the X represents the unknown and is to take the place of the last name since black people in America adopted the name of slave masters. If one is not able to trace their history and find their original name, then an X takes its place (Udom, 1962).

After Raymond became an official member of the Nation of Islam, he continued to listen to the rhetoric of Elijah Muhammad and read and studied the bible and the Qur'an as both texts were used by the movement. Raymond became a minister of Atlanta temple # 15. According to him, each city had a number. Atlanta was the fifteenth city that set up a temple under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad.

As a minister, Raymond was responsible for recruiting more members to the organization. He also helped start Atlanta's economic development program as he acquired farmland for the movement, sold the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper, sold foods such as fish and eggs. "I was doing my part in the economic development of the Nation of Islam, but through the sale of fish and eggs and other farm products that we was raising, we saw ourselves really as a nation within a nation."

Hakeem: Hakeem is from Atlanta, GA and he joined the Nation of Islam and received his X in 1966. Prior to converting to Islam, he was Christian and was heavily involved in the Civil Rights Movement as he was a member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. He considered himself well to do as he shared that he was middle class. "I was working for Lockheed and I had a pretty decent job."

Hakeem also shared that a friend of his would listen to Elijah Muhammad's radio broadcast on W.E.R.D. every Sunday. He admitted that he was initially not interested. "At first I wasn't really paying attention, but paying attention, and every time the Messenger [Elijah Muhammad] was asking questions, I really didn't have an answer for them." The questions asked on the radio broadcast incited Hakeem's interest and he eventually joined the movement. Hakeem was and still is an artist. His artistic ability was embraced by the Nation of Islam and they of-

fered him a job at Muhammad Speaks Press, located in Chicago, Illinois. Chicago was also the headquarters for the Nation of Islam.

The Muhammad Speaks Press was responsible for the dispersal of the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper, which reemphasized Elijah Muhammad's religious and economic ideology. The newspaper discussed economic adversities facing black communities as well as possible solutions to solve them. It also served as a communication tool between members of the Nation of Islam and the non-Muslim community (Muhammad, 2000).

Hakeem felt that he was really involved in Elijah Muhammad's economic program by working for the press. "That was a good feeling to me….that you were helping the Nation and the Nation was helping you." Although Hakeem does not confine himself to a particular Mosque or temple, he still adheres to Elijah Muhammad's religious and economic teachings.

Willis: Willis joined the Nation of Islam in 1968 in Atlanta. He joined the Nation of Islam because he never heard anyone talk about black people doing something to improve their life chances. "That's what attracted me, the opportunity that blacks had to do something for themselves. That was my thought at the time, to help my people, to see what they could really do themselves."

Willis shared that he was relatively poor growing up and that he was not always concerned with just helping himself, he also wanted to help others and he did this by working in the Nation of Islam's economic program by selling the newspaper and goods to black people at affordable prices. His testimony was enlightening as he discussed his perception and experiences in Elijah Muhammad's economic program. He stated that even though he was poor when he converted to the Nation of Islam, he was rich in other ways. "Rich, he [Elijah Muhammad] made me rich spiritually."

Joseph: Joseph is from Atlanta, GA and joined the Nation of Islam in 1971. He really joined the Nation of Islam in 1970 and received his X in 1971. He joined the Nation of Islam because he was searching for something greater than Christianity even though he was raised as devout Christian. "It was my attempt to perfect Christianity...that led me to the Nation of Islam."

Like Hakeem, Joseph also had a decent job working for the fire department. "I was an Atlanta firefighter when I was introduced to the Nation of Islam by a number of members. My first visit to the temple [in Atlanta] changed my life." Joseph was attracted to the movement because of the minister's teaching on economic self-sufficiency. He later exclaimed that Muhammad's teaching impacted him so much that he is now a self-made millionaire. Joseph is also a very energetic individual. He also shared that his work ethic improved while he was in the movement, but he admits that he was a highly driven individual prior to his membership.

Shemar: Shemar is from Atlanta and he joined the Nation of Islam in 1972. He primarily joined the movement because Elijah Muhammad emphasized having "knowledge of self and doing for self." At the time he joined, he was a working man. "I would say I didn't have much. "I had a job making a basic salary, just a working man." Shemar also went into the history of his family and how he was raised. He stated "I grew up in a family of three sisters and three brothers. There were seven of us in all. My parents were Christians and I would say I had a pretty good childhood. But as I got older, I became more interested in god, religion, and I think my quest led me to Islam, the Nation of Islam."

Shemar also insisted that his joining the Nation of Islam made him feel special in a "strange, but positive kind of way." He is the only one in his family who joined the Nation of Islam. Currently he does not attend a Mosque or temple but incorporates Elijah Muhammad's teachings into daily practice.

As noted in Table 1, all pioneers identify with the Nation of Islam even though Hakeem, Willis, and Shemar do not currently attend an official Mosque and/or temple. Raymond attends a Nation of Islam temple regularly. Joseph no longer identifies with the Nation of Islam. He is currently a member of Atlanta's Sunni Muslim community. At the same time, he does not deny his involvement in Elijah Muhammad's economic program and still credits his success in life to the lessons he learned from while in the Nation of Islam.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed according to the phenomenological procedures put forth by Creswell (2007). Generally, the procedures are to provide a description of the personal experiences of the concept or phenomenon, compile a list of significant statements pertaining to the concept or phenomenon, group the significant statements into larger themes, and write a description of what the participants experienced and how the experience happened. Finally a composite description fusing both the meaning and textural description is made and is typically written in a paragraph.

The data collected from the interviews were initially divided into four major themes. After re-reading each pioneer's response, a fifth theme emerged. The five themes are as follows:

1. Develop an Identity
2. A Way Out of Economic Oppression
3. Improved Work Ethic
4. Economically Self-Sufficient
5. A Plan with Current Applications.

These themes emerged from the significant statements extracted from the transcriptions. Table 2 is an example of the significant statements and derived meanings.

Table 2: Overview of Significant Statement and Derived Meanings

Significant Statement	**Derived Meaning**
…trying to become a person seeking an identity…led me to the Nation of Islam.	The Nation of Islam helped the pioneers develop an identity
I saw the program as a way to fight racism. I found a job working for the Nation.	The economic program provided a way out of economic oppression
…give a good day's work for an honest day's pay. So my work ethic improved a lot.	The pioneer's work ethic improved.
I support a family of seven on my own. I work for myself. He taught me that.	The pioneers learned to be economically self sufficient.
The [economic] plan was for a people that don't have a plan…it will never die….	The economic plan works and has current applications.

Theme 1: Develop an Identity

The pioneers noted that they were either searching for a religious or spiritual base and were loosely connected to the church. Under this theme, the pioneers describe why they joined the Nation of Islam and how they developed a renewed sense of identity. The sense of identity is also tied to their experiences while working in the economic program. Raymond commented:

> Well, I never was a member of the church, but I claimed to be. My mother was a member of the church….I believed in the Jesus I had heard about, that's the only thing I could, if I had a belief. I had believed in what I had been taught, but I never was no church going person.

Raymond later exclaimed that the Nation of Islam gave him self-definition as he stopped some of his vices. He felt better about being black. Identifying with the movement improved his life and self-esteem.

> It [the Nation of Islam] made me realize I wasn't no Negro, it made me realize this was a stigma….the Honorable Elijah Muhammad made us know that we were the original people of the earth, which when you learn that, you really feel proud and don't want to be

> nobody but who you are… I was a reefer smoker, I drank liquor, I gambled, I did all them things, I chased women and he [Elijah Muhammad] stopped me from doing all of that…

Joseph, who was a devoted Christian, mentioned that he wanted to perfect his religion and was "seeking an identity." He stated:

> Well, I was reared as a very devout Christian and trying to perfect my Christian uh experience, I uh had a few challenges that simply, really disturbed me and trying to be a person who was seeking an identity and trying to fulfill his religious obligation, I think Allah allowed me to be led to the Nation of Islam at that time. But it was my attempt to try to perfect uh Christianity.

Shemar shared "What stood out the most when I heard the teaching of the knowledge of self and to do something for self." His engagement in the movement's economic program gave him a sense of belonging. He further stated that:

> I was working on the job and I would look around and see my people all working hard for this one large goal. It was a great feeling---this feeling of belonging. We were all working hard and doing good and loving it. When we went out into the world and had to face all that hate…I felt so glad to be part of the Nation. It helped me cope…It gave me something good to belong to.

While Shemar's statement does not explicitly mention identity, he does share that working for the Nation of Islam made him feel like he belonged to something positive since the outer world was unwelcoming or filled with "hate." Udom's (1962) study mentions that the majority of those who joined the movement were acting in response "to their emptiness---their lack of identity---and their seemingly fixed position [in society] (p. 96)." Shemar's statement reflects this assessment.

Hakeem, who was involved in SNCC and "gave up on religion" tied his sense of identity to his employment in the movement.

> You just felt secure, the idea that you're working for the Nation, that you were helping the Nation and the Nation was helping you and it was a good feeling. I have to say that was a really good feeling to me.

Willis who was a Christian prior to joining the Nation of Islam said that he "wasn't deep into anything" and the movement made him proud to be black. He further stated: "I was no longer ashamed to be black. See when I was growing up, if someone called you black that was an insult. It was a very insult. Those were fighting words."

Theme 2: A Way Out of Economic Oppression

The pioneers generally concurred that Elijah Muhammad's economic program also helped them to combat racism and economic oppression. Under this theme, the pioneers describe their economic background as well as how the movement improved or enhanced their economic standing.

Raymond described his economic situation before joining the organization. He mentioned how racism impacted the life chances of black people during the 1950s. He later gives credit to the movement for helping him find meaningful ways to combat economic problems such as the lack of money and resources.

> Economics for a black man during those days was very small…at that time it was a postman's job or school teaching, so my economics did not come from working. I was what you call uh a gambler before I joined the Nation of Islam and after I joined the Nation of Islam, I did uh what we call hustling jobs like waiting tables and stuff like that to make

> quick money because uh working there at the time waiting was so low. That wasn't my cup of tea.

Raymond's statement implies that it was difficult for black people to economically advance during the 1950s. Black people were often forced to work menial jobs which did not do much to improve their economic lot. Consequentially, some African Americans found relief in the Nation of Islam.

Raymond described how his economic situation was temporary as he joined ranks with the Nation of Islam. He began working for the movement and sold the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper. While doing this, he also helped other black people economically. He spoke with assertion and confidence as he described his change in economic status and how others benefitted from the program.

> During those pivotal years in the early 1960s we stepped up our campaign on the sale of the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper and through the sale of the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad began to buy farmland to show us a plan of how we could do for self and he purchased five thousand acres of land in Georgia. …doing for self and making it possible to help our people to have employment. In fact, I housed, I employed here in the city in Atlanta, I had 139 people employed to our Mosque. It was 139 people depending on the Nation of Islam for their livelihood.

Similar to Raymond, Shemar also shared that his economic chances were narrow in the 1960s and 1970s when he was a young man. When he graduated from high school, he searched for employment. He did find odd jobs, but he mentioned that he was always in search for a better job and when he encountered difficulties finding employment, he went to the Nation of Islam for aide. He explained:

> At that time, I was young, fresh out of school and I wanted to make money to support myself and move out of my parent's home. I had a job making uh basic salary. I didn't have much. I saw the program as a way to fight against racism….one thing that the Nation of Islam taught me was to do something for self and I remember working on the job and when the job---work would slack off or we were just laid off from the job for a period of time. I worked for the temple, the temple had produce and products and businesses for me to work.

In Shemar's case, wanting to be independent after finishing high school is not atypical and he did find different jobs. However, when finding employment was difficult, he worked for the Nation of Islam and sold products to supplement his income. From his statement, one can conclude that the movement helped him find a way out of tough economic situations.

Joseph shared that he was a firefighter at the time he joined the movement. Rather than solely work for the movement, he decided to be both a firefighter and a worker for the Nation of Islam. He also admitted to being self-employed. Joseph is also a man with a lot of vigor and he was very excited to tell his perception and experience while he was involved the economic program.

> I was an Atlanta firefighter when I was introduced to the Nation of Islam by a number of members of the Nation of Islam but my first visit to the temple…changed my life…I chose to be self-employed and I sold the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper, I sold the fish, I sold a number of other items to try to earn a living and that's what I did for five years.

Even though Joseph had a stable job when he joined the movement, he still was able to boost his income by selling products from the Nation of Islam. In his situation, the Nation of Islam enhanced his economic position.

Willis mentioned that he was relatively poor at the time he joined the movement. He was attracted to the religious component of the movement but he tied it to economics. He stated "I was poor. Poor financially, rich, he [Elijah Muhammad] made me rich spiritually." Later on in his interview he asserted that there was "riches in religion" and that Elijah Muhammad's economic program made him rich spiritually and financially. He also stated that "it [the economic program] taught me how to use my finances….before then, I didn't save anything, after then I started, I started to save money."

Hakeem's socioeconomic status was different from Raymond, Willis, Joseph, and Shemar's. He came from a middle class background and had a decent job. Although he admitted that racism and discrimination was a huge issue in his life as he was involved in the Civil Rights Movement, he did not worry much about economics. But when he joined the movement he was hired by Muhammad Speaks Press and quickly moved up in rank. "I started off as an artist and uhm, I got promoted to job production control supervisor, where I was in charge of three departments, the art room, camera room, and the press. Hakeem felt so secure with his position at Muhammad Speaks Press that he quit his job a Lockheed.

Theme 3: Improved Work Ethic

The pioneers all agreed that their work ethic improved even if they already possessed good working skills. Within this theme, the pioneers actually delve in the experiences they had while participating in the Elijah Muhammad's economic program. Raymond explained some of the duties he performed while minister in Atlanta. The responsibilities assigned to him influenced his work ethic. Hence, he became an industrious worker. Raymond also mentioned that he acted as a liaison between the Atlanta temple and Chicago where Elijah Muhammad resided. Raymond was responsible for reporting Atlanta's economic progress to Elijah Muhammad while

he was minister. In response to a follow up question pertaining to how often he visited Elijah Muhammad, he stated. “Sometimes three and four times a month cause I was doing things for him on the farm. I used to buy turkeys for him, cattle, cows—I used to buy things from him. I was his liaison between here and the farm.”

According to Raymond, he also helped the movement secure land. “Carroll County around Dawson, Georgia and Leesburg and Bronwood, Georgia and we bought two thousand acres over in Alabama and we bought another two thousand acres in the state of Michigan.” Raymond also discussed the meetings that took place between Elijah Muhammad and ministers from other temples in the U.S. The agenda of these meetings always pertained to alleviating African American economic problems. He also discusses how his responsibilities as a minister improved his work ethic.

> …When I was at his table as one of his ministers as he instruct us he would teach us in the way that we are thirty million people in America at that time---that’s what the census said and he said they eat three meals a day and he would say that means brothers we have to supply ninety million people with bread daily. That’s the way he taught us how to think and he was showing us we can do it. But at the same time we got these farms uh through the sale of the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper he began to import the fish, uh the whiting fish which I ain’t never heard of it before…we started importing a million pounds of fish into this country, in fact I sold forty thousand pounds a month here in Atlanta and I sold forty thousand copies of *Muhammad Speaks* here in Atlanta every week. If you’re working for self, you got to work twice harder for yourself than you do working for somebody else…you can’t be lazy…trifling.

Raymond also shared that he and other men who sold goods by the Nation of Islam were

able to keep the profits in order to sustain themselves and their families. His work ethic improved as he mentioned that he could not be lazy as a minister.

Joseph shared that he had a good work ethic prior to joining the movement because he was a firefighter. He mentioned that he was ambitious and remained positive when it came to life and overcoming the challenges that came with it. In an eager and exciting tone, he stated:

> I think I had uh, I would say maybe a little above average work ethic. I had some ambition but when I became a member of the Nation of Islam, I was introduced to a number of disciplines that simply inspired me to become a bigger and better person on a day to day basis…always trying to be the best, always trying to be a person who would commit to do the best and to be a person of your word. A major involvement in what is called continuous learning or uh continuous education and you know there were not only me, but there were a number of members in the Nation of Islam who demonstrated a high willingness to learn.

Shemar also professed to have a good work ethic prior to joining the Nation of Islam. He also admitted that being involved in activities such as selling the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper enhanced his work ethic.

> I always had a good work ethic. I was always punctual, on time, so I had a good work ethic. It improved a lot because when you are working for yourself and on your own, it makes you an entrepreneur and an entrepreneur is one that assumes the risk and responsibility of his own business so that made me one hundred percent responsible. That alone made me work hard, hard, hard.

Willis shared that his work ethic improved while working in and outside the movement. He also explained how he earned respect from his peers because he valued his work. His account is as follows.

> The Messenger always taught to give a good day's work for an honest days pay. He taught us don't go slack on the job. Go on the job and give a good day's work. So my work ethic changed a lot. It taught me uh always show respect to the people I was dealing with…so I carried those lessons on with me through the years and uh showing people the respect…people seem to notice that on every job…

Hakeem, who was employed at Muhammad Speaks Press, did not talk about how his work ethic improved. Instead, he talked about his work ethic in relation to others who worked at the Press. "Everybody at Muhammad Speaks Press, you didn't see people jiving off and playing. As mentioned earlier, Hakeem moved up in rank within the Press as he became manager of three different divisions, the art room, camera room, and the press. He insisted that there was no time to be lazy or negligent.

Theme 4: Economically Self-Sufficient

Within this theme, the pioneers describe how Elijah Muhammad's economic program helped them become economically self-sufficient. This portion elaborates what and how the pioneers experienced the economic program. It also includes how this program impacted their lives overall.

Raymond describes how the men who participated in Atlanta's economic program became self-sufficient by selling products such as fish, eggs, produce, and the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper. He expressed that men in the program did not have financial worries.

> Never worry bout no money. I had---making so much with the products in the Nation, I also used to import suits out of New York, go to New York, hundreds of suits and bring back here. Buy them wholesale and bring them back here for the brothers to sale so they can make money. So they were making money selling suits, selling fish, selling eggs, and selling papers. None of my men starved for nothing. In fact, I auctioned a pie once at the Mosque, you know for fund raising for the school [University of Islam]. I sold a cheese pie for three hundred dollars and who bought the pie?---one of the brothers who sell papers everyday, and who was bidding against him?---the brother who sell papers everyday.

To this day, Raymond is deeply involved in the economic aspect of the movement under the auspices of Louis Farrakhan. He explained that the temple still owns thousands of acres of land in Dawson, Georgia. Raymond mentioned that he does not worry about money. "I am helping the nation and the nation is helping me.

Shemar shared how he became economically self-sufficient. He solely contributes his entrepreneurial skills to his experiences in the economic program. The program helped him build his social skills. This is his account:

> I sold the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper, I was a school bus driver. I drove the Muhammad University of Islam school bus. I would pick up the children…and I sold the fish. The fresh fish, the fresh fish…one of the main lessons I learned from being in the Nation of Islam was people themselves---to know people, how to talk with people, how to deal with people. I can honestly say that if it was not for the program, I would not have been able to sustain a family of seven people for over thirty five years solely on my own. I have never worked for anyone but myself after I joined the Nation of Islam. My family never starved, never went without the necessities. To this very day, I still sell merchan-

> dise to people and I am almost sixty years old. I am able to save, pay all bills, and still indulge in the luxuries of life.

Hakeem also admitted that he is able to support his family. He mentioned that he is not rich, but he does not worry about money so much. “I haven’t found a zillion dollars yet. I am able to feed my family, my kids have never seen an empty refrigerator, they never starved or want for anything within reason. Similarly, Willis shared that following Elijah Muhammad’s Three Year Economic Plan helped him become financially stable. This economic strategy urged black people to refrain from purchasing items such as clothes and shoes and alcohol in excess. He stated “I put down the alcohol, put down the alcohol; I put down the cigarettes for a time…that helped me and also my finances with my family, my children and everything.

Joseph is different from the other pioneers. Not only does he work in law enforcement, but he also owns his own company. He gives seminars on the secrets to success and professes to be a self-made millionaire. When asked about why he chose to become self-employed and who his role models were, he stated:

> Well it was the teachings of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, uh up you mighty nation you can accomplish what you will and it was one of the first times that I’ve ever heard uh encouraging instructions to stand up and do something for yourself, for yourself and to be self reliant and determine your own destiny and that help me to understand what a man was and I had the faith. It [the economic program] was the greatest discipline and training that I have ever received in my whole life…I have used the discipline in the Nation of Islam to become a better human being, to become a better husband, to become a better a better father to my children, and to become a better citizen…in this community.

Although the pioneers’ experiences in this program is generally positive, that does not

imply that they did not face adversity and difficulty. Both Raymond and Willis noted that racism played a factor in some of their negative experiences. Raymond said "We had many altercations with the police trying to stop our movement. I had a brother trying to run us from downtown for selling the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper and they come up with a plot to run us out and in their plot uh a fight broke out..." Likewise, Willis shared that "…the Caucasian, he had a law where we couldn't sell papers, he didn't want us to sell papers so it was kind of a duck and dodge to sell papers. So we sold from mostly in the neighborhoods, we wasn't able to come out on the streets and sale at the time."

In the middle of this type of adversity, the pioneers managed to continue working in the program where they were able to sustain themselves. It is important to note that Joseph and Willis also had jobs outside the movement. The Nation of Islam was not the only source that influenced their economic state. Raymond worked solely for the movement as he was minister and oversaw the economic program in Atlanta. Shemar worked for the organization and also became an entrepreneur. Hakeem was fully employed at the Muhammad Speaks Press. He did not mention that he sold food and other products like the other pioneers. All the pioneers did acknowledge that their experiences in the program influenced them while on the road to becoming economically self-sufficient.

Theme 5: A Plan with Current Applications

Under this theme, the pioneers detail their overall perception of Elijah Muhammad's economic program. The pioneers commented on the practicality of the program and suggested that the program continues to be relevant. All pioneers had a general understanding of the movement's economic agenda. Raymond simply stated "It is a plan…to develop a people…" Shemar asserted that the "National Economic Savings plans was to galvanize a people, bring them to-

gether, and teach them how to do for self, how to become self-independent. Willis and Hakeem explained their understanding of the program in more detail. Willis stated:

> The Messenger [Elijah Muhammad] wanted…black peoples in general to sacrifice for three years to reduce their spending on extravagant things such as automobiles, clothing, sport and play, cigarettes and tobacco and make a donation to the three year economic. Saw farmland, we saw businesses open up. We saw a bank, the Messenger opened up a bank in Chicago. So you could see the result of the three year economic plan. There was always a progress report… to show what the Messenger was doing. We got a progress report, so it was never a question on where the money was going.

Likewise Hakeem shared:

> Well he [Elijah Muhammad] pushed for us to…Three Year Economical Plan. Well it applied to us as individuals. It was for the Nation that we were gathering money to make an investment…to put forth money to financially help the Nation and ourselves because it could be applied both ways.

In a follow-up conversation with Hakeem on the above statement, he mentioned that "both ways" meant that the Three Year Economic Plan was to help the nation and the individual. In both cases money could be saved. The pioneers also donated money to the Three Year Economic program. Elijah Muhammad wanted African Americans to send their contributions to the movement's headquarters located in Chicago, Illinois (Muhammad, 1965). All pioneers said that they gave whatever they could. Joseph and Raymond had the most significant comments relating to this aspect. Joseph shared:

> We contributed to those plans to build a number of structures to allow us to even become more independent. It was to build a national treasure so that we could have our own hos-

> pitals, our own schools, and a number of other basic facilities that would allow for community, to improve community life and I was involved with those plans by making financial contributions because I wanted to make sure that they could come into fruition and be successful.

Generally, the pioneers shared that members would donate to the program anytime they could. There was no set amount. Raymond stated that "if you ain't got the money, you ain't got money, but if you got some, give what you can." Shemar stated that "at that time, we would have a charity from and we would donate our monies and the secretary would take our money and send it to Chicago." Shemar also noted that non-members donated to the program.

The pioneers shared that this program could work for people in general and that it was not limited to people who joined the Nation of Islam. People in and outside of the movement were employed in the various businesses owned and operated by the Nation of Islam (Udom, 1962). Hakeem gave more insights concerning this as he stated:

> When the Nation bought that bank, the Messenger had put out the word that this wasn't just for Muslims and even when the [Muhammad Speaks] Press hired, we hired just as many non-Muslims as we did Muslims and even when the bank opened he [Elijah Muhammad] said if a person had a job if they applied for a loan let them have the loan you know---and that just wasn't to the Muslims, that was to the community.

Joseph saw first hand how this program incorporated both members and non-members. In an enthusiastic voice, he shared what he witnessed while visiting one of the farms in Atlanta. He shared that this farm boosted the economic system in Terrell County Georgia. He stated:

> I happened to visit that farm many many times and I saw it in full production and it created the economy system for Terrell county, that farm stimulated jobs and income not

> only for members of the Nation of Islam but all the non members of the Nation of Islam including those who were white.

Hakeem and Joseph's account is reflective of how Elijah Muhammad's economic program can impact individuals regardless of race and religious affiliations. In their final remarks about this program, the pioneers spoke about the longevity and applicability of the economic program. Raymond, Hakeem and Shemar's testimony was the most significant. Raymond stated "Well it is a plan and it's a plan today. If our people followed it, contributed to it, we could free our people, we could free our people from the kitchen of the white man, we could buy enough food so we could feed ourselves, that's what it's for…" Hakeem stated that "The Messenger's plan was for a people that don't have a plan. It was for the uplift of black people and the Messenger's plan will never die because everybody needs what the Messenger taught. Even America can use that plan, not per se the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, but any nation has to do----the Messenger was introducing us to nationhood, self-survival, self-help, do for self." Shemar stated that "it was a permanent plan, a plan that continues through generations after generations."

Summary

What the pioneers perceived and experienced in Elijah Muhammad's economic program was empowering and it impacted their lives in a positive way. The findings reveal that this program helped the pioneers create an identity, provided a way out of economic oppression, improved their work ethic, and led them to become economically self-sufficient. Summarily, the pioneers believed that Elijah Muhammad's economic program is applicable to people who are economically besieged.

Chapter 5 discusses the conclusions and implications of the findings. Connections to the empirical literature and theoretical concepts emerge in the chapter. Finally, recommendations are made for future studies.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to gather the perceptions and experiences of the pioneers who were involved in Elijah Muhammad's economic program and how the program impacted their lives. The overall research questions were: How did the program impact the pioneer? What was the pioneer's perception of Elijah Muhammad's economic program? What was the pioneer's experience while involved in the program? Follow up questions were asked to ensure that comprehensive responses were given. Subsequent research questions for this study are as follows:

1. What made you join the Nation of Islam? What appealed to you?
2. What were your duties while in the movement?
3. In what ways did you participate in the economic program?
4. How would you describe your financial situation at the time of your conversion?
5. Did working within the economic realm of the movement help you financially?
6. How would you describe your work ethic before and after you joined the Nation of Islam?
7. What lessons did you learn while employed in the Nation of Islam?
8. Did you feel used or taken advantage of?
9. Was Elijah Muhammad's economic program empowering to you?
10. What was your overall perception of this program?
11. Describe some of your positive and negative experiences while in the movement?
12. Are you familiar with the Three Year Economic/National Savings Plan? If so, what was your basic understanding of those plans?
13. Did you see progress take place within the movement? What evidence of progress did you see?

Five African American men who participated in Elijah Muhammad's economic program were selected and interviewed for the purposes of this study. All of the men interviewed for this study met the criterion. 1. Participants must have been members of the Nation of Islam prior to 1975. 2. Individuals in this study must have been active in Elijah Muhammad's the economic program i.e. worked in the business establishments, on the farms, or within the temple structure. All five participants or pioneers were interviewed individually. Four face to face interviews were conducted and one was conducted over the phone. All the interviews were semi-structured. This study is qualitative and employs a phenomenological method.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first portion is the discussion and conclusion of the study where each of the five themes will be discussed in relation to the empirical literature and the theoretical concepts discussed in Chapter 1. The second part is the implications of the study. Lastly, recommendations for future research are discussed.

In Chapter 4, five themes emerged from the interview transcriptions. They are as follows:

1. Develop an Identity
2. A Way Out of Economic Oppression
3. Improved Work Ethic
4. Economically Self-Sufficient
5. A Plan with Current Applications

Discussion and Conclusion

The pioneers in this study felt that the economic program of Elijah Muhammad helped them create an identity. This search for an identity and a sense of belonging is not a new phenomenon when discussing the African American experience. During slavery, black people sought to define themselves by separating from racist institutions. An example of this is the A.M.E

church as noted in the literature review. After slavery was abolished, the formerly enslaved were drawn to nationalist and religious ideologies because they offered them hope for a creative survival. They wanted to improve their status in life, particularly their economic lot in life as they searched for land and jobs.

All of the pioneers, in some form, wanted to improve an aspect of their life. Joseph mentioned that he wanted to perfect Christianity while Raymond and Hakeem shared that they were not really tied to a religious institution as young men. Willis "was no longer ashamed to be black" after joining the movement and Shemar shared that working for the movement made him feel like he belonged. Lincoln (1961) observed that the membership base was composed mostly of young black men. He postulated that the movement was appealing to young blacks because it was an activist movement in that it provided solutions to black people's problems in the realm of religion and economics.

Udom (1962) noted that the Nation of Islam carved out a unique identity for black people in America. The membership base of the movement was primarily composed of lower-class black people who lived in urban areas and had religious roots in Christianity. The pioneers interviewed admitted that they came from poor and working class backgrounds with the exception of Hakeem, who considered himself in the middle class before joining the Nation of Islam. Four of the pioneers in this study did not have any advanced degrees while Hakeem had a college degree. Willis, who quit school in his second year did not obtain a diploma. In their quest for something greater, some black people saw refuge in Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam. It improved their self-esteem as they became renewed people. Most of the pioneers not only changed their religious beliefs, but they also changed their name. Turner (1997) argues that name changing was part of this search for an identity and it is known as signification.

Turner (1997) posited that the concept of signification is found in Black Nationalist movements such as the Moorish Science Temple of America (MSTA), the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), and Nation of Islam. Signification pertains to the notion that black people have to change their name, religion, and way of dress to counter white racism in America.

Following the path of his predecessors, Elijah Muhammad also wanted to give African Americans an entirely new identity separate from their oppressive past. He urged black Americans to operate change in several areas, specifically their name and religion. With regards to religion, Islam was the alternative to Christianity because it was not seen as an oppressive religion. Since the institution of slavery forced enslaved Africans to adopt Eurocentric names, Muhammad taught black Americans to change their surnames to Arabic names or replace it with an "X" which symbolized the unknown (Turner, 1997; Udom, 1962). All of the pioneers interviewed were official members of the Nation of Islam and their surname was replaced with an X. Summarily, all of the pioneers shared that their involvement in the Nation of Islam and its economic program gave them a new identity.

The pioneers also saw Elijah Muhammad's economic program as a way out of economic oppression. During the decades of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s racial and economic adversities confronted African Americans. Due to racism, the chance for black economic advancement was narrow. Some people had decent jobs like Hakeem, who worked for Lockheed and Joseph, who was a firefighter. Others such as Raymond resulted to hustling, dealing drugs, and gambling for economic survival.

After the pioneers joined the movement and participated in the economic program, their economic status improved because in addition to their jobs, they made extra monies from selling

products owned by the movement. Lincoln (1961) also noted that Muhammad's focus on unity and solidarity helped counter racism and the economic program he developed and executed countered the problem of economics.

Raymond reported that the movement pushed the sale of the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper where the proceeds went towards the opening of various business enterprises and the acquirement of farmland. The farmland was used to grow vegetables and raise cattle. The farmland was bought to show black people how they could do for self on a collective and individual level. Not only did some of the pioneers have occupations outside of the Nation of Islam, but in addition, they sold the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper and other products on a daily basis in African American neighborhoods. This was a benefit to them as well as the movement as a whole. The pioneers were able to keep some of the profits for themselves. While none of the pioneers explicitly stated that the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper was used for recruitment purposes, it was and it helped to increase the size of the movement (Clegg, 1997; Lincoln, 1961; Udom, 1962).

While working in the economic program of the Nation of Islam, the pioneers' generally agreed that their work ethic improved and as a result, the pioneers became economically self-sufficient. Elijah Muhammad emphasized working hard, saving money, and exercising thrift (Muhammad, 1965; Tyler, 1966). As part of his Three Year Economic Plan, he urged black people to donate 25 cents per week or a dollar a month to the movement and gave a concrete example of the benefit that could result from nationwide savings. He stated:

> If we just save five cents a day from wages, 25 cents a week, $1 a month---that would mean $13 a year we could save in a national savings bank. We number around 22 million and approximately five million are wage earners. If five million wage-earners saved $13 a year, this

would mean $65 million saved out of our wages. At the rate of 25 cents per week, it would be painless (Muhammad, 1965 pp. 195-196).

Muhammad's emphasis on working hard and saving money has led many scholars to conclude that he incorporated Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic* in his program and this is why the movement was an overall success (Mamiya, 1982; Lincoln, 1961; Sodiq, 1994; Tyler, 1966; Udom, 1962). The findings from this study concur with the notion that the Protestant work ethic helped the pioneers become economically self-sufficient. As Hakeem noted, the Three Year economic plan was beneficial in both ways---on the collective and individual level.

From the pioneers' testimony, one can conclude that this program influenced how they economically sustained themselves. Joseph owns his own company and proudly exclaimed that he is a self-made millionaire. Shemar asserted that he has been self-employed for over thirty-five years and maintains a family of seven people. Raymond shared that he does not worry about not having money while Willis and Hakeem both shared that they save money whenever they can and their economic situation has improved. All the pioneers mentioned that their involvement in Elijah Muhammad's economic program impacted their lives and influenced how they spend and save money.

The benefits the pioneers' gained from their experiences in the economic program led them to believe that Muhammad's program can influence the lives of individuals in modern society. Elijah Muhammad's economic program helped both Muslims and non-Muslims. Hakeem noted that the bank the movement opened in Chicago not only employed Muslims and non Muslims, it also welcomed members to use services the bank offered. Udom's (1962) study substantiates Hakeem's claim. He found that in 1958, one of Elijah Muhammad's daughters managed a clothing shop for women in Chicago. It employed three full-time Muslim women and employed

people who were not members of the movement. Hakeem and Shemar shared that the economic plan could be applicable to people who need help on an economic level.

In conclusion, the pioneers perceived Muhammad's economic program to be empowering because it helped them forge an identity, offered a way out of economic oppression, improved their work ethic, and allowed them to become economically self-sufficient. Through their experiences in the program, the pioneers also believe that the tenets of the program can currently aid people in need of economic empowerment. Therefore, one can safely presume that the pioneers' perception of Elijah Muhammad's economic program was positive and their experiences in the program provided them with skills that continue to influence their lives.

Implications

The findings of this study imply that religious institutions can advance the lives of people economically. Elijah Muhammad apparently turned his religious organization into an economic tool for the liberation of black people in America. The testimony from the pioneers reveals that this economic program was successful and empowering.

Elijah Muhammad showed black people how they could do for self by executing a program that taught them practical skills to become economically self-sufficient. As noted in Chapter 2, Leon Sullivan also established an economic program known as the Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America (OIC). The OIC helped underserved blacks acquire the skills necessary to find decent jobs that would improve their economic status. Sullivan successfully helped over five thousand people find jobs. Through the training offered at OIC, individuals not only learned skills, but they gained confidence and was optimistic about their chances of finding employment (Sullivan, 1968). Therefore, black religious institutions have a history of improving the life chances of African Americans.

The findings from this study also imply that teaching practical strategies can help people help themselves. Elijah Muhammad urged black people to be thrifty, save money, and stop spending unnecessarily. By adhering to this rubric, the pioneers were able to see the immediate benefits; hence, they saved money and sustained themselves and their families. They also saw how Muhammad combined theory with praxis. Elijah Muhammad asked people to donate to his Three Year Economic Program. After contributing to this plan, the pioneers visibly saw the businesses opening up, farmland, and members working in the enterprises. Willis shared that there was always a progress report that pertained to the economic expansion of the movement. Since the pioneers' witnessed this economic success on the macro level, they believed that they could also benefit from the strategies on a micro level. Joseph and Shemar ventured into entrepreneurial activities while the remaining pioneers saved and invested their money.

In addition to emphasizing strategies on saving money, a strong work ethic is also beneficial. Tyler (1966) noted that the "Black Muslims became well-known for honesty and hard work, so they were often able to obtain jobs easier than other blacks (p. 147)." Likewise, Weber argued that the Protestant's work ethic allowed them to accumulate capital that advanced their quality of life. Summarily, programs that offer practical strategies on how to save money and those that emphasize the benefits of saving money are more likely to improve people's economic lives.

The findings of this study also reveal that black economic development initiatives can help black people economically advance. Although there have been cases where black leaders and entrepreneurs exploit others to their advantage, there have been examples of economic programs that benefit black people. An example would be the black church. In addition to Sullivan's (1968) strategy, St. Peter Claver Catholic Church developed a self-help program that offered several services in poverty-stricken communities. The church offered test prep courses as a

means of empowerment. As a result, individuals who utilized the services were more likely to find jobs or advance in their careers (Carter, et al., 2005).

Hutchinson (2001) believes that self-help and black economic strategies limit the chances black people have in advancing. He asserts that while black entrepreneurs encourage other blacks to "buy black," they, in turn, do nothing to help black consumers. Marable (2000) concurs with Hutchinson's assessment as he also notes that the black entrepreneur's primary goal is to make profits while exploiting others. While their criticisms are indeed valid, there are black businessmen who care about the welfare of other blacks. An example being the Nation of Islam as both Muslims and non-Muslims were employed in the movement's business enterprises and the products were sold at affordable prices (Udom, 1962).

Moreover, in this study, none of the pioneers felt exploited while involved in the economic program of Elijah Muhammad. The pioneers were specifically asked to describe their experiences both negative and positive and if they felt used or abused while active in the program. All five pioneers had nothing negative to share about the program and that their negative experiences were caused by factors outside of the movement i.e. racism. For example, Raymond and Willis both shared how the police attempted to stop them from selling the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper downtown and in certain neighborhoods.

In accord, some scholars posit that the economic development strategies put forth by African American leaders is not necessarily capable of tackling complicated problems such as drug abuse and economic underdevelopment in black communities (Hutchinson, 2001; Marable 2000). Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam generally succeeded in tackling the major problems affecting impoverished communities. In response to an inquiry from the researcher that put forth the notion that Elijah Muhammad was only concerned with his own enrichment, Raymond stated

"Hold on just now…He [Elijah Muhammad] stopped making me smoke reefer, stop me from smoking cigarettes, stop me from drinking liquor and everything else. Now who benefitted from that, he or me?" Raymond's response coincides with earlier studies on the organization. Specifically Lincoln (1994), Udom (1962), and Clegg's (1997) work posit that the movement transformed the lives of many of its adherents including criminals. For instance, Lincoln noted that "The regeneration of criminals and other fallen persons is a prime concern of the Black Muslims, and they have an enviable record of success (p.77)." Thus, Elijah Muhammad's economic program is an example of a black economic development initiative that benefitted and improved the life chances of the pioneers.

Moreover, the participants in this study felt that their involvement in the economic program was to help black people become economically independent. In a sense, they felt obliged to participate in the program and did not feel misused. The pioneers gave donations to the National Savings Plan. Joseph summed up the general sentiments of the members involved in the economic program.

> We contributed to those plans to build a number of structures to allow us to even become more independent…so that we could have our own hospitals, our own schools, and a number of other basic facilities that would allow for community, to improve community life and I… wanted to make sure that they could come into fruition and be successful.

The pioneers were convinced that they were working for the collective enrichment of black people in the United States and that they positively benefitted from the economic program and did not feel exploited in the process.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to gather the perceptions and experiences of the pioneers who were involved in Elijah Muhammad's economic program and how the program impacted their lives. Based on the findings and implications of this study, future research should:

- Examine contemporary black economic development programs and how they impact black people's lives.
- Explore the perceptions and experiences of women involved in the economic program of Elijah Muhammad

Examine contemporary black economic development programs and how they impact black people's lives.

More studies concerning how contemporary black economic development initiatives are helping black people will also enrich the discussion pertaining to the benefits and ills of black economic development. What strategies are these programs employing and do they work? Data should be collected from the participants in the programs in order to assess whether the economic initiatives work. Religious institutions should also be included. Exploring such programs can serve as a foundation to for future programs.

Explore the perceptions and experiences of women involved in the economic program of Elijah Muhammad

Only men were interviewed in this study. The voices of women were not captured and future studies should gather women's perceptions and experiences in Elijah Muhammad's economic program. According to West (1994), women in the Nation of Islam occupied a marginal space in the movement and were not necessarily viewed as primary agents in the advancement of the movement. Her study explored how women in the Nation of Islam under the leadership of Elijah

Muhammad actively participated in the economic program. She argued that their role as mothers, wives, and teachers constituted a unique form of activism. While they were not on the street selling Muhammad Speaks newspaper like the men, they were working in the restaurants, and grocery stores. Some women even worked from their homes. While West's study does begin to capture some of the women's experiences while in the movement, more studies should capture what they perceived Elijah Muhammad's economic program to be. Their experiences while in the program will also be informative because their voices are void in the majority of the literature pertaining to the movement.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to gather the perceptions and experiences of the pioneers who were involved in Elijah Muhammad's economic program as well as how the program impacted their lives. This study adds to the existing body of literature on the Nation of Islam and Elijah Muhammad's economic program. Five African American men who were actively involved in the economic program were interviewed for this study. The findings of this study revealed that this program helped them develop an identity, provided a way out of economic oppression, improved their work ethic, made them economically self-sufficient, and the pioneers believe that this program has current applications. The implications of this study were discussed and recommendations for future research were suggested.

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APPENDIX A

Georgia State University
Department of African American Studies
Interview Consent Form

Title: Perceptions and Experiences in Elijah Muhammad's Economic Program: Voices from the Pioneers

Student Investigator: Nafeesa Muhammad

I. Purpose

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by Nafeesa Muhammad from Georgia State University located in Atlanta. Nafeesa Muhammad and Georgia State University would like to conduct a research study about your experiences and perceptions of Elijah Muhammad's economic program prior to 1975.

II. Procedures

If you decide to participate, Nafeesa Muhammad will conduct an extensive interview with you about your experiences and perceptions of Elijah Muhammad's economic program. You will be asked personal open-ended questions regarding your experiences while active in the Nation of Islam. Some of the information requested will concern your duties in the day to day operations of the economic program and the impact the program had on your life during the time period. The interview may be recorded (audio taped) only with your permission.

The interview will take place at the temple meeting location at a time that is convenient for you and will last no more than 90 minutes.

III. Risks and Confidentiality

There are no greater risks than those encountered in daily life. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. If you give your permission by signing this document, only Nafeesa Muhammad and Georgia State University will have access to the information.

IV. Benefits

Although you may not benefit personally, your account of what you perceived and experienced in Elijah Muhammad's economic program can be used to advance poor communities struggling to thrive economically. Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relations with Georgia State University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw

your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without penalty. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Georgia State University has reviewed and approved the present research.

V. Contact Persons

If you have any question please contact Nafeesa Muhammad at 678-927-6644 or nfsmuhammad@yahoo.com If you have further questions contact Dr. Sarita Davis at Georgia State University's Department of African American Studies at 404-413-5135 saritadavis@gsu.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Votgner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svotgner@gsu.edu

VI. Copy of Consent Form to Subject

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

Initials_____

If you are willing to participate in this research, please sign below

Date: _____ Print Name_____

Signature_____ Signature of Student Investigator _____

Initials_____

PART I: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Year of Birth:_____
2. Zip Code_____
3. Years active in the Nation of Islam_____

PART II: LOCATING INFORMATION

Primary contact:

Participants Name: _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

Secondary contact:

Phone: _____

Address: _____

Current Affiliated Mosque/Temple (if applicable):_____
_____

APPENDIX B

Overarching Research Questions: How did the program impact the pioneer? What was the pioneer's perception of Elijah Muhammad's economic program? What was the pioneer's experience while involved in the economic program?

Interview Guide

1. What made you join the Nation of Islam? What appealed to you?
2. What were your duties while in the movement?
3. In what ways did you participate in the economic program?
4. How would you describe your financial situation at the time of your conversion?
5. Did working within the economic realm of the movement help you financially?
6. How would you describe your work ethic before and after you joined the Nation of Islam?
7. What lessons did you learn while employed in the Nation of Islam?
8. Did you feel used or taken advantage of?
9. Was Elijah Muhammad's economic program empowering to you?
10. What was your overall perception of this program?
11. Describe some of your positive and negative experiences while in the movement?
12. Are you familiar with the Three Year Economic/National Savings Plan? If so, what was your basic understanding of those plans?
13. Did you see progress take place within the movement? What evidence of progress did you see?