

Notes, Comments, and Photos

A Seat at the Table of American Democracy

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The following reference notes, comments, and other materials are intended to supplement my article entitled “A Seat at the Table of American Democracy—Imam W. Deen Mohammed and the Carter White House: A Model for Engagement,” published in the Jan/Feb 2021 issue of *Islamic Horizons Magazine*. (<https://issuu.com/isnacreative>).

Imam W. Deen Mohammad’s various names and titles. At the time of his passing on Sept. 8, 2008, Imam Mohammed (R.A.) usually identified himself as “Imam W. Deen Mohammed.” Over the course of his life, however, he identified himself by various names and titles. At the time of the Dec. 14, 1977 meeting of Black leaders at the White House, he was known as “Emam Wallace D. Muhammad.” From mid-1978 through early 1979, during which time his Chicago delegation was provided an all-day briefing in Washington by U.S. government agencies, he was known by the same name, but the spelling of his title was changed from “Emam” to “Imam.” Lastly, during both Clinton inaugural prayer services in 1993 and 1997, he was identified as “Imam Wallace Mohammed, Muslim American Spokesman for Human Salvation.” So you may see these different name spellings and titles in the publications and media reports listed here, but please know that they are referring to the same individual. Throughout these notes, the term “the imam,” refers to Imam Mohammed.

Imam Mohammed as America’s “most underappreciated religious figure.” When referring to the imam, Taylor Branch identifies him as “Imam Wallace D. Muhammad.” See, *The Clinton Tapes*, p. 24, Simon & Schuster, New York (2009).

President Clinton’s first Inaugural Interfaith Church Service (January 20, 1993) was held at Metropolitan A.M.E. Church, Washington, D.C. At the following link view Imam Mohammed at approximately: 48 minutes, 30 seconds into the ceremony. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?37247-1/inaugural-interfaith-church-service>

President Clinton’s second Inaugural Interfaith Church Service (January 20, 1997) also was held at Metropolitan A.M.E. Church in Washington, D.C., a historical Black church. View Imam Mohammed at approximately: 1 hour, 28 minutes into the ceremony. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?78109-1/inaugural-interfaith-prayer-service>

Clinton’s consultation list for reconciliation remarks. See, the “One America Folder: Reconciliation Group,” National Archives Identifier 27499346, which includes the imam on page 2 as “Wallace Muhammad (American Muslim Community)”: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/27499346>

***Ebony Magazine's* annual list of “100 Most Influential Blacks” (1975-77):**

Imam W. Deen Mohammed was included on the lists as follows:

- May 1975 (p. 50): as “Hon. Wallace Muhammad, Supreme Minister, Nation of Islam.”
- May 1976 (p. 66) as: “Hon. Wallace Muhammad, Chief Minister, Nation of Islam.”
- May 1977 (p. 82) as: “Hon. Wallace Muhammad, Chief Imam, World Community of Islam in the West.”

[**Note:** Up until 1975, *Ebony* listed the imam’s father (the “Hon. Elijah Muhammad”), whom he succeeded as leader of the Nation of Islam, among the 100 most influential Blacks.]

Ebony's 1970-79 back issues may be accessed at:

<https://books.google.com/books/about/Ebony.html?id=bdQDAAAAMBAJ>

Imam Mohammed’s 1977 outreach to other leaders. *See*, Abdul Aleem Seifullah, “Year of progress for WCIW under Emam Muhammad’s Leadership,” *Bilalian News*, January 20, 1978, p. 4. This article also references President Carter’s meeting with Black leaders at the White House and an earlier invitation to Imam Mohammed to attend an October 1977 dinner honoring the Nigerian head of state, Olusegun Obasanjo. (It’s worth noting that the imam attended Jimmy Carter’s inaugural ceremony as an invited guest, thus demonstrating that imam’s status with the Carter Administration long before the meeting between the president and Black leaders. (*See*, Ghayth Nur Kashif, “W.D. Muhammad Speaks on the Future of America,” *Bilalian News*, Feb. 11, 1977, p. 11). An organized group of Black leaders (“Black Leadership Forum”) preexisted the imam’s outreach efforts. He eventually accepted an invitation to join their organization.

Criticism of President Carter by Black Leaders:

Ernest Holsendolph, “Carter to Be Target As the Urban League Opens Parley Today,” *New York Times*, July 24, 1977, page 14.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1977/07/24/archives/carter-to-be-target-as-the-urban-league-opens-parley-today-fearful.html>

Alex Poinsett, “Annual Progress Report: 1977: Year of Hope and Despair,” *Ebony Magazine*, Jan. 1978, p. 25. <https://books.google.com/books/about/Ebony.html?id=bdQDAAAAMBAJ>

Munir Umrani, “President Carter lends moral direction to nation’s high office,” *Bilalian News*, Jan. 20, 1978, p. 5. (Quoting Carter: “I have been in office now six months, have no apologies...”)

President Carter’s White House meeting with Black Leaders:

“Black Leaders Appeal to Carter for Meeting on Jobless ‘Crisis,’” *New York Times*, Nov. 5, 1977, p. 11, (describing the black leaders’ request for a meeting with President Carter).

<https://www.nytimes.com/1977/11/05/archives/black-leaders-appeal-to-carter-for-meeting-on-jobless-crisis.html>

David E. Rosenbaum, “Black Leaders Find Carter Ready to Aid,” *New York Times*, Dec. 15, 1977, p. 25. (This article lists “Wallace D. Muhammad, chief Imam of the World Community of Islam in the West” as an attendee at the White House meeting.)

<https://www.nytimes.com/1977/12/15/archives/black-leaders-find-carter-ready-to-aid-but-after-meeting-at-white.html>

Carter Administration’s Expansion of the Minority Business Aid Program

Jane Seaberry, “Commerce Revises Plan to Aid Minority Firms,” *Washington Post*, Aug. 15, 1979. (Carter Administration revamped the minority business assistance program.)

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/business/1979/08/15/commerce-revises-plan-to-aid-minority-firms/1696eaea-f7a9-4eb1-929d-77b7b378f0e8/>

Carter Administration’s Post-Meeting Interactions with the World Community of Al-Islam in the West (WCIW)

“Imam Wallace D. Muhammad welcomed in Washington: U.S. Agencies brief WCIW delegation on foreign, commercial affairs,” *Bilalian News*, July 7, 1978, p. 3. **Summary:** U.S. agencies (Commerce Dept. and State Dept.) briefed the WCIW Chicago delegation during an intensive all-day visit to Washington on key international, commercial, and foreign policy issues. This was part of a Commerce Department-WCIW initiative in the Chicago area to develop ongoing communication and cooperation in programs designed to benefit the minority community. The delegation included Allen Cheng, who became president of American Pouch Foods. The article also highlights an additional historical aspect of the White House meeting. In addition to being special because it involved the leaders of many major Black organizations, by including Imam Mohammed, it was including the former leader of the *original* Lost-Found Nation of Islam (NOI), which had been a Black separatist and social reform movement at the time the imam ascended to its leadership in 1975. (See the expanded treatment of this aspect of the meeting under the “Miscellaneous” caption at the end of these notes.)

WCIW’s Investment in American Pouch Foods

See, Wallace D. Muhammad, “Respect for the Elderly,” *Bilalian News*, Feb. 8, 1980. At the very end of the article the imam says WCIW contributed only real property to the American Pouch Foods partnership. Posted on *New Africa Radio* website. <http://newafricaradio.com/articles/2-8-80.html>

Miscellaneous Notes

U.S. Senate honored Islam in 1979

During the period of the imam’s business transactions with the Carter Administration, the U.S. Senate honored the Fourteenth Centennial of Islam. See: *S. Con. Res. 43—96th Congress* (1979-1980), October 15, 1979. Also see, “14th Centennial Commemorated: Senate Extols Al-Islam,” *Bilalian News*, p. 3, Nov. 9, 1979.

The White House Meeting Room

The White House meeting between Jimmy Carter and the Black leaders took place in the West Wing's famous Roosevelt Room, across the hall from the Oval Office. It features paintings of both Theodore and Franklin D. Roosevelt. Among other things, it includes Theodore Roosevelt's equestrian portrait by Tade Styka titled *Rough Rider* before which Imam Mohammed and the other dignitaries were photographed with President Carter.

Additional information about the American Pouch Food transactions

The American Pouch Foods Company (APF) was awarded a multi-million dollar contract by the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) on January 29, 1979 to provide Meals Ready to Eat (MREs). They were intended to replace the military's C-Ration. Technically called the thermostabilization of foods in flexible pouches, MREs are premeasured portions that come in specially designed envelopes that are placed in water (hot or cold, depending on the contents) prior to eating. They were expected to have a useful life up to 10 years.

At the time of award it was the largest contract ever awarded to a minority-owned company. In addition to the DLA's \$21.3 million award, loan guarantees, grants, and contracts from other federal agencies, including HUD and the Commerce Dept, brought the total amount of funding much higher. By some estimates it was as much as \$35 million in potential funding. Adjusted for inflation this currently would equal about \$133 million.

The enterprise was expected to result in hundreds of jobs and eventually expand to include international sales—including halal products. However, after receiving \$13 million in progress payments, on Friday, November 7, 1980, three days after the election trouncing by Ronald Reagan of Jimmy Carter (489 to 49 electoral votes, respectively), DLA terminated the contract for default on the basis of alleged inadequate performance. The termination was devastating for both APF partners.

For more about the contract and the debilitating financial aftermath of the termination of the contract, see the following:

ACCESS Magazine, a publication of the U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of Minority Business Enterprise. March/April 1979 "Minority Firm Produces Space-Age Rations," p.4-5. https://books.google.com/books?id=k3qg9NXGVpIC&pg=RA11-PA5&lpg=RA11-PA5&dq=%22american+pouch+foods%22+%22allen+cheng%22&source=bl&ots=HGjQ9sCoJg&sig=ACfU3U1RP6Gh8TXaGLkAMtjwdR4XeTuVrA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj5gcn_84LtAhWnp1kKH6DhYQ6AEwAHoECAIQAg#v=onepage&q=%22american%20pouch%20foods%22%20%22allen%20cheng%22&f=false

In Re American Pouch Foods, Inc., 30 B.R. 1015 (N.D. Ill. 1983)
<https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/BR/30/1015/1815694/>

IN RE: American Pouch Foods, Inc., 83-2530 (8/26/83)

https://books.google.com/books?id=qMQSN74RTWcC&pg=PR1&lpg=PR1&dq=%22american+pouch+foods%22+partnership&source=bl&ots=k2uU1wQH4u&sig=ACfU3U0LLWfVB0wf7ehf0_ADJHSWon2Uxw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi3ILzg-oLtAhVsvlkKHeuuCHcQ6AEwDHoECACQA#v=onepage&q=%22american%20pouch%20foods%22%20partnership&f=false

The White House Meeting included the leader of the transformed (original) Nation of Islam

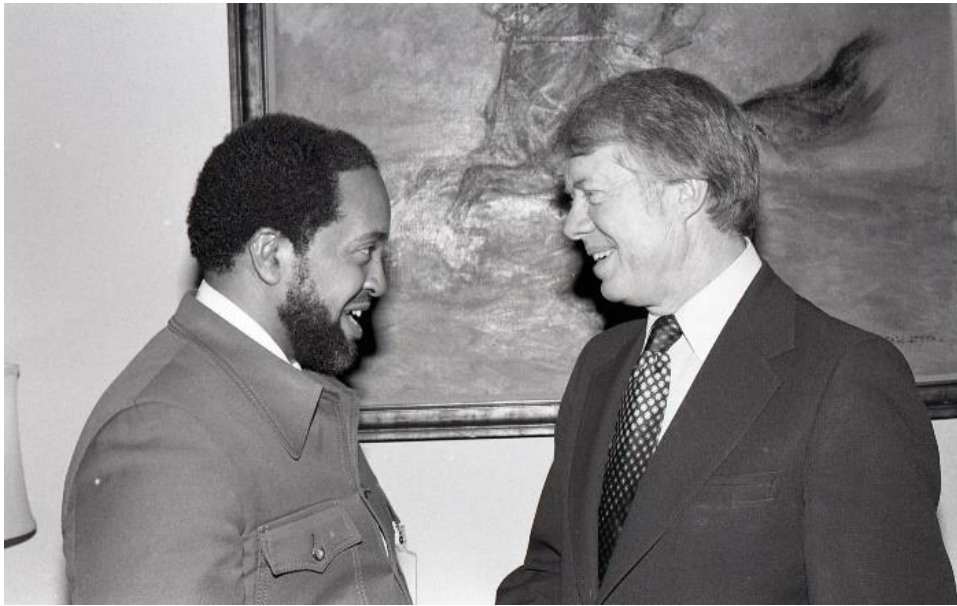
By including Imam Mohammed as leader of the WCIW, the White House and Black Leadership Forum were including the head of the transformed original Lost-Found Nation of Islam (NOI)¹, which had been a Black separatist and social reform movement at the time the imam ascended to its leadership in 1975. So this, too, was a first.

The original NOI's tenets on separatism and race relations resulted in it being something of a pariah in most mainstream political circles. During its forty-five year history, it had advocated for a 5-state separate Black nation in the Southeastern United States, a concept that may have been adapted from the 1928 and 1930 platforms of the American Communist party. (Examine the history and work of Harry Haywood, James W. Ford, and James A. Allen for details on the Comintern's position on establishing a separate Black nation in North America.)

Among other things, Imam Mohammed changed the name of the organization from the NOI to the WCIW and removed separatism from its platform. He systematically transitioned it into a mainstream Muslim organization and encouraged its members to identify with America. (*Bilalian News*, July 15, 1977, p.3) Ironically, as he did so, rather than other longstanding mainstream Muslim groups, it was he and the WCIW that were welcomed into mainstream political activities and invited to the White House, just like a prodigal son. And while several prominent NOI members rejected the imam's changes by breaking away and establishing new NOI-type organizations using the old name and similar doctrines, the vast majority of the membership embraced the changes and remained with the WCIW. It was an organizational evolution that literary icon and civil rights activist James Baldwin regarded in 1977 as not necessarily changes, but simply intrinsic in the thrust of the organization and perfectly logical for "the only black movement which survived." See, Joe Walker, "James Baldwin: An Interview with a Native Son," *Bilalian News*, Feb. 11, 1977, p. 6. Baldwin was quite familiar with the NOI and wrote extensively about it in his highly celebrated narrative, *The Fire Next Time* (1963).

¹ To understand why it was called "Lost-Found Nation of Islam," read and analyze one of the Bible's most popular passages attributed to Jesus (Isa ibn Maryam) (R.A.)—the parables of the lost sheep and the prodigal son. (New Testament, Luke 15:4-32). "Prodigal," in addition to meaning extravagant or wasteful, has been given by some the nuanced interpretation of meaning lost—just like a lost sheep, lost people, or in the case of the American descendants of slavery, "lost Muslims from Africa." This latter meaning was the one the founder of the NOI meant when he established the movement using syncretized Christian, Islamic, and mythological elements. A very good treatment of the parable from a Christian perspective is provided by Clarence L. Haynes, Jr. at the following webpage: <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/what-is-the-meaning-of-the-prodigal-son-story-in-luke.html>.

PHOTOGRAPHS



Imam Mohammed being greeted by **President Carter** in the Roosevelt Room of the White House during his Dec. 14, 1977 meeting with Black leaders. (Courtesy of the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum.)



Imam Mohammed (seated, center rear) in attendance at President Carter's meeting with Black leaders. (Courtesy of the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum.)



Another view of **Imam Mohammed** at President Carter's meeting with Black leaders, Dec. 14, 1977. (Courtesy of the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum.)



President Carter also welcomed **Vernon E. Jordan, Jr.**, executive director of the National Urban League and spokesperson for the visiting Black Leadership Forum. (Courtesy of the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum.)

More than a dozen other Black Leaders attended the meeting including:



Coretta Scott King (Full Employment Action Council)



Jesse Jackson (People United to Save Humanity)



Dorothy Height (National Council of Negro Women)



Parren Mitchell (Congressional Black Caucus)

[All above photos also are courtesy of the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum.]

The American Pouch Foods Signing Ceremony



Imam W. Deen Mohammed, WCIW (seated, left), and **Allen Cheng**, president of American Pouch Foods (seated, right) at the Jan. 29, 1979 signing ceremony for the multi-million dollar American Pouch Foods-DLA contract. The event was hosted by **U.S. Navy Captain Stuart F. Platt**, deputy commander of the Defense Personnel Support Center (seated, center). **U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young** (standing behind the Imam) also attended. (U.S. Commerce Dept photo.)

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