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Perspectives New & Old"*

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## Front Matter

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PREFACE

3

FAREWELL TO MAY ALIM

5

**ISLAM AND THE AFRICAN AMERICAN  
CONNECTION: PERSPECTIVES NEW AND OLD**

OUR FAMILY FROM THE INSIDE:  
GROWING UP WITH MALCOLM X

Wilfred Little

Lecture and Q & A Session at University of Massachusetts  
at Amherst, April 18, 1995

7

THE NATION OF ISLAM

Hatim A. Sahib

INTRODUCTION, 48

1. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE MOVEMENT, 53

THE MOVEMENT IN DETROIT. The Prophet. Growth of the movement.  
Schisms and conflicts. Efforts to exploit the movement. The Movement in  
Chicago. Growth of the movement. Schisms and conflicts. Emergence of  
economic interests. Persecutions. The Apostle and the teachings.

2. THE FOLLOWERS, 77

SOCIAL BACKGROUND. EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND. AGE AND GENDER  
STRUCTURE. WHO GETS WHAT, AND HOW? PROBLEMS FACED BY FOLLOWERS

3. PECULIAR ORGANIZATIONAL FEATURES, 87

ISOLATION. SYMBOLISM. IDEOLOGY. MYTHS. ISLAM AND NEGRO ASPIRATIONS.  
SOCIAL CONTROLS. INSTITUTIONALIZED FEATURES. Status System. Donations.  
Collective Activities. The University of Islam.

4. CONVERSION, 120

AGITATION. Form and Content. Success and Effectiveness of  
Agitation. CONVERSION OF THE ASIATICS. Definition of conversion.

Process and causes of conversion

**5. GROUP PARTICIPATION, 130**

RITUAL OF ACCEPTING THE NEW MEMBER. ASSIMILATION OF NEW MEMBERS. NEW SELF-CONCEPTION. NEW HABITS AND ATTITUDES. Recreation. Food habits. Dress. Learning the language of their ancestors. Imputations. Military and educational training. Working hard. Hatred for the white man. MYTHS AS MECHANISMS OF BEHAVIOR. NEW VOCABULARY. FUNCTIONAL DIFFERENTIATION. BELIEFS.

**6. ORGANIZATIONAL ROLES, 148**

DEFINITION OF ROLES. ROLE OF THE APOSTLE. ROLES OF OTHERS. DIFFERENTIATION OF ROLES AND DIVISION OF LABOR

**INTERLUDE**

**CRISPUS ATTUCKS**

John Boyle O'Reilly

161

**FEATURES**

**WHITE BACKLASH AND THE AFTERMATH OF FAGEN'S  
REBELLION: THE FATES OF THREE AFRICAN-  
AMERICAN SOLDIERS IN THE PHILIPPINES, 1901-1902**

Scot Brown

165

**PERFIDIOUS ALBION: BRITAIN, THE USA, AND  
SLAVERY IN THE 1840s AND 1860s**

Marika Sherwood

174

**THE PRO-JAPANESE UTTERANCES OF W. E. B. DU BOIS**

Reginald Kearney

201

**NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS**

218

***CONTRIBUTIONS IN BLACK STUDIES***

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## PREFACE

**O**NCE AGAIN an issue—a double issue, in fact—of CONTRIBUTIONS IN BLACK STUDIES survives formidable gestation pains and sees the light of day! This ersatz 1995/1996 number is actually going to press in mid-1999. A major focus of CONTRIBUTIONS 13/14 is the Islam-African American connection. We address this phenomenon from the perspectives of Wilfred Little, eldest brother of Malcolm X, who details the experiences of growing up inside the family of Louise and Earl Little; and Hatim A. Sahib, sociologist and early scholar of the Nation of Islam, whose work is presently known only to a handful of scholars. Sadly, Wilfred Little passed away a year ago on May 19, 1998—the 73rd anniversary of his brother Malcolm's birth. Fortunately, however, Wilfred Little left behind a rather detailed autobiographical account of his life in a lecture delivered at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst in April 1995. A second document, culled from a Question and Answer session following the screening of several video documentaries devoted to Malcolm X, repeats a number of lecture points, yet provides new information concerning Wilfred's break with the NOI, his religious views towards the end of his life, his perceptions of Louis Farrakhan, and some private thoughts concerning his brother Malcolm's assassination. Wilfred Little's talk and Q&A session were carefully transcribed by Aimée Racicot of the former Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities at UMass/Amherst, and edited by William Strickland of the University's W. E. B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies.

Devoted to the inner workings of the Nation of Islam, Hatim A. Sahib's little-known M.A. thesis was completed in 1951 at the University of Chicago. While the theoretical issues undergirding his sociological study of the Nation occasionally overwhelm its empirical content, what remains are extremely detailed and insightful interviews of NOI members at all levels of the organization, according an unprecedented look inside the NOI at a critical stage of its institutionalization. Here is a close examination of the groundwork prepared by Elijah Muhammad which would enable Malcolm X, who, arriving only a year later, helped propel the Nation from a four-temple entity with approximately 400 adherents, to a country-wide network eventually consisting of 100 temples and some 40,000 members. We are grateful for the labors of Lucinda Ealy, who expertly retyped the thesis for us.

*John Boyle O'Reilly's stirring poem devoted to the legendary Crispus Attucks comes by way of University of Massachusetts President William M. Bulger, who apprised us of its existence and graciously furnished us with a copy. Although virtually unknown to most Afro-Americans today, the fiery Irish poet, author, and editor of the Boston Pilot was widely recognized as an ardent supporter of the black struggle for freedom and justice by the early 1880s. Readers desiring further information about O'Reilly may refer to John R. Betts, "The Negro and the New England Conscience in the Days of John Boyle O'Reilly," Journal of Negro History 51 (October 1966): 246-61; and the new biography by Anthony G. Evans, Fanatic Heart: A Life of John Boyle O'Reilly, 1844-1890 (1997), now available in paperback from Northeastern University Press.*

*Scot Brown obligingly provided us with his essay on the aftermath of Fagen's Rebellion, named for the Afro-American soldier, David Fagen. A member of one of four black regiments sent by the U.S. military in 1899 to suppress Filipino nationalist aspirations for independence, Fagen defected to the Filipino nationalist cause and led a protracted war against American forces which lasted two years. Brown discusses the fates of three black American soldiers in the wake of the rebellion. And he vows to return to the subject of African American troops in the Philippines once his dissertation is completed.*

*Marika Sherwood returns to the pages of CONTRIBUTIONS with an essay which is certain to annoy academic experts who have long maintained that the British suppression of the African slave trade was uniformly binding on British slavers. Not so, according to Sherwood, who marshals substantial evidence that, in deference to domestic commercial considerations, "Perfidious Albion," after 1807, often cast an eye in the other direction as British slavers scrambled to maintain their involvement in the trade in human beings.*

*Finally, Reginald Kearney also returns to our pages with another look at Afro-Nippon relations—this time with respect to W. E. B. Du Bois, whose ardent defense of Japanese colonialism in the light of its challenge to western expansionism has heretofore received little scholarly attention. Kearney notes that, although Du Bois is readily identifiable with Pan-Africanism, few associate him with Pan-Asianism. However one feels about the role played by Du Bois, concludes Kearney, he was a profound contributor to the "pervasive and enduring pro-Japanese sentiments" found in black American communities before and during World War II.*

*This may come as a shock to disbelievers and wanton purveyors of falsehood, but two brand new issues of CONTRIBUTIONS (for contents consult the final pages of this issue) lie imminent in the wings, and may yet roll off the presses before the heralded Millennium. If not, they most likely will be delivered by the fabled four beasts with six wings and multitudinous eyes, in which case it probably will not matter anyway. . . .*

We mourn for May Ayim  
May 3, 1960 - August 9, 1996

FAREWELL TO MAY AYIM

There are no right and no wrong words  
for something that is unspeakable  
there is no right and no wrong behaviour  
for something that remains incomprehensible\*

May Ayim is dead. On August 9, 1996 she took the decision to depart from life. We mourn for May Ayim as an author, fighter, and beloved friend.

May Ayim, of Ghanaian and German descent, was born in Hamburg in 1960 and spent the first one-and-a-half years of her life in a foster home, then in a foster family. She studied education in Regensburg and completed a degree as a speech therapist in Berlin where she lived since 1984.

May Ayim had been an activist in the Black Community and the Women's Movement for many years. Through her commitment and her characteristic way of connecting, she continually contributed to bringing people of the most diverse cultures and political backgrounds together. In 1985 she was one of the founders of the ISD [Initiative of Black Germans and Blacks in Germany], which has become a national organization. In the last few years she worked as an assistant lecturer at universities in Berlin, as a speech therapist, and as student counselor of the Alice Salomon School for Social Work.

Many of May Ayim's poems and essays were published in books and magazines (before 1992, under the name May Opitz). The book, *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out*, which she co-edited (published in 1986 in German and in 1992 in English translation by the University of Massachusetts Press), was based on her thesis about the history and present situation of Black Germans. She was also co-editor and author of the book, *Entfernte Verbindungen* [Distant Ties: Racism, Antisemitism, Classism].

At numerous political events, demonstrations, and debates May Ayim electrified and moved her audience. Over and over again she surprised her listeners in Germany, the USA, in Canada, South Africa, England, Switzerland, Austria, and the Netherlands with her keen observations, her sense of humor, and her irony.

After having become well-known through her poetry readings—or rather, performances—May Ayim published a collection of poetry in 1995, *blues in schwarz weiss* [blues in black and white]. Author Maryse Condé, who wrote the foreword, describes her first meeting with May Ayim:

... With the unmistakable sound of her voice her poems spoke to me of her, told of others that are like her and yet so unlike her, in Germany, in Africa, in America. These poems held passion and irony and always a powerful attraction. The voice: young and very old. Listening to her I once again encountered her determined commitment, since even her humor, her play with words and punch lines never veil the strength of her protest against racism, sexism and all the other isms that weave sadness into our society. In May's voice I found the echo of other voices from the diaspora. . . .

With her personality, her charisma, and the very special style of her poetry, May Ayim touched people across many borders, inspired them to take on new perspectives, and gave them strength and courage.

without defying death  
departed from life  
lively  
for a life  
that we will carry on  
a life that  
when it passes  
leaves pain and yearning and hope  
and love

a life  
that  
not only leaves something  
but a lot  
that is worth being carried on.\*

We thank you, May.

Orlanda Frauenverlag



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\*These excerpts were taken and translated from the poem, "ANA" (1992), included in *blues in schwarz weiss*.