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**Karl Evanz. *The Messenger: The Rise and Fall of Elijah Muhammad*.
New York: Pantheon, 1999. Pp. ix + 667. \$28.50 (Cloth).**

[1] Karl Evanz has produced an intriguing full scale biography of the late Honorable Elijah Muhammad. The name "Messenger" was used of Muhammad as a term of endearment, prophecy, and spiritual sobriety. This study illuminates the life of this African American leader from a journalistic lens. The biography is organized into nineteen chapters, which range from the early background and life of Muhammad to the fall of the Nation of Islam. Throughout the middle chapters of the book Evanzz illustrates how Muhammad was consistently involved in African American activism, first by exploring his membership in the Moorish Science Temple, the Universal Negro Improvement Association, the Allah Temple of Islam, and then by noting how he became the central and driving leader behind the Nation of Islam. Muhammad is often misunderstood for his spiritual, theological, and historical teachings. He blended the teachings of Islam, Pan Africanism, Black Nationalism, and Metaphysics. Evanzz attempts to provide a rationale for these political philosophies and the praxis of African Americans during the 1930s - 1950s. Being born in Georgia and witnessing first hand the cruelties of Jim Crow and Blacks being lynched, Muhammad drew upon his historical and cultural experiences of survival.

[2] The Nation of Islam had its beginning in 1930 with Master Wallace Fard Muhammad's ministry to a few committed aspirants. By 1933, because of internal and external strife in the Detroit community, as well as the departure of Fard and Ugan Ali - two of the early ciphered leaders in the Allah Temple of Islam - the labor of instruction and management of this assembly was transmitted to the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. During this early period of Muhammad's leadership, the organization went through an ideological transition. By the end of the 1940s, Muhammad's strategic plan of operation was moving forward. By the early 1950s, the Nation of Islam was identified as one of the largest Black Businesses in America, yet it was simultaneously labelled as a threat to the internal security of the United States.

[3] Evanzz studies Muhammad by identifying a series of complexities: growing up in the segregated south, working as a non-skilled laborer, involvement in Black nationalists organizations, father, son, and husband, and leader of one of the most powerful

organizations from the late 1950s to the early 1970s. These experiences directly influenced the teachings of Elijah Muhammad who emphasized black autonomy, self knowledge, history, and philosophy to emancipate and transform the so-called "Black man lost in North America." Throughout, the early chapters of the book, Evanzz identifies connections and relationships between high ranking officials in the Nation of Islam and Muhammad's previous affiliations in the Moorish Science Temple and the Universal Negro Improvement Association. For example, Earl Little, the father of Malcolm X, preached as a minister to both Clara Evans Muhammad's family and Elijah Muhammad when they lived in Georgia. Likewise, Ella X Little, the sister of Malcolm X, previously knew both Clara Evans and Elijah when they lived in Georgia. Moreover, Elijah Muhammad was a colleague of Joseph Gravitt-el Sr., and appointed Joseph Gravitt-el Jr. as security to Malcolm X when Malcolm was assigned to Temple #7 in Harlem. Evanzz emphasizes how these affiliations are important in studying Muhammad in his place and time.

[4] One of the central and most important aspects of this book is Evanzz's attention to the role of Clara Evans Muhammad, who was the wife and partner of Muhammad in the establishment, development, and advancement of the Nation of Islam. Often mentioned in a colloquial manner, few have documented the role she played in being a confidant, mother, wife, and spiritual counselor for Muhammad and the Nation of Islam as whole. Evanzz also records in detail how the FBI through COINTELPRO manufactured evidence and correspondence in order to agitate disputes between Clara Evans and Elijah. This information provides great insight into Muhammad and is one of the key values of the book.

[5] Equally important, Evanzz examines how the Federal government devised the dismantling of the Nation of Islam, first by accosting Elijah Muhammad's fraternal family, and then by instigating discord between Wallace D. Muhammad and Malcolm X as potential successors to the leadership of the Nation of Islam. Put another way, the author argues that the Federal government's methodical ploys of surveillance and turmoil to undermine the Nation of Islam were intentional and conspicuous.

[6] At times this profile on the late Honorable Elijah Muhammad reads more like a historiography of the Nation of Islam rather than a full scale biography. In terms of methodology, the author relies on secondary sources and federal government memos, especially in reference to COINTELPRO files, for much of his information. Muhammad was under surveillance by the FBI during most of his years as an activist and spiritual leader. Evanzz demonstrates how the FBI "patented" a plan to dismantle the Allah Temple of Islam, and disseminated uncertainties about the character of Muhammad. Muhammad was always on the move, and the paranoia of trust and confidence in family and high ranking officials in the Nation of Islam was vigorous. By the mid-1970s, the Nation of Islam was to experience a second rebirth, with Wallace D. Muhammad being appointed as the Leader of this organization. From this period, going forward into the 1980s, the practice of Islam would be more orthodox and the former teachings would become historical. Although this study of Muhammad is similar to much of the intellectual history of African American activists, Evanzz has made an important contribution to the literature and body of information documenting the Nation of Islam.

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