

Book Review: *Finding W.D  
Fard: Unveiling the Identity of  
the Founder of the Nation of  
Islam*

*By John Andrew Morrow*

BY BILAL MUHAMMAD



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## Keywords

W.D Fard Muhammad, Nation of Islam, Malcolm X, Elijah Muhammad

**Book Review:** *Finding W.D Fard: Unveiling the Identity of the Founder of the Nation of Islam* by John Andrew Morrow (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019), Pp. xxviii + 471. ISBN 978-1527521995. \$115.50

A discussion on the history of civil rights and race relations in America would be incomplete without an inquiry into the Nation of Islam (NOI). The NOI introduced the world to figures of historic consequence, such as Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, Louis Farrakhan, and Warith Deen Muhammad. The literal godhead of this prolific movement is a man rarely spoken about: W.D. Fard. Also known as Master Fard Muhammad, he was the man of many aliases that arrived in Detroit in 1930 and disappeared without a trace in 1934. He would be called a professor, a prophet, the Mahdi, the Messiah, and even Allah in Person. He taught thousands of registered Black Muslims in the early years of the Great Depression.

Supposedly hailing from Mecca, from the lineage of the Prophet Muhammad, it has been difficult for scholars to sift the man from the myth. Besides few surviving public records and a doctored photograph, most of what we know about Fard comes from Elijah Muhammad, the long-time leader of the NOI. Many questions must be asked. As a non-African foreigner – yet the founder of one of the most militant black nationalist organizations in the world – where did Fard really come from, where did he go, what were his motivations, and where did his unique teachings come from?

In his masterpiece *Finding W.D. Fard*, Dr. John Andrew Morrow demonstrates that he is not just a competent historian, but a thorough investigator. He does not leave a stone unturned, as he examines all the existing research on the identity of the enigmatic Fard. Morrow gets so close to the mystery man, that you can almost touch him. The reader is taken through a whirlwind of facts and theories on Fard's origins, religious persuasions, business ventures, relationships, and run-ins with the law. After each lead is followed and each theory is unpacked, Morrow includes possible inconsistencies and evidentiary issues. This keeps the reader engaged throughout the nearly 500-page textbook.

*Finding W.D. Fard* relies partly on the research of Evazz, Arian, and other authors, but every previous claim is rigorously fact-checked. Unlike the aforementioned writers, Morrow offers a detailed understanding of the subtleties of Shī'ism, which become relevant when pinpointing the origins of Fard's doctrine. Furthermore, Morrow appears to truly have no "dog in the fight" and offers honest research without an intention to denigrate or exonerate the founder of the NOI. The book offers several new contributions to the field, including possible details on Fard's relatives, business partners, and life as a street politician and restaurateur. The target audience includes fellow researchers and discerning readers who have an interest and familiarity with the subject at hand.

While Morrow does not definitively locate W.D. Fard, he concludes that Fard was likely a Muslim immigrant from central Asia. Specifically, Morrow postulates that Fard was a "Nusayri, an Isma'ili, an Ithna-'Ashari ... Alevi or a Bektashi" (p. 330) based on the occult doctrines of twelve (or twenty-four) scientists, the theophanic powers of these scientists, and the concepts of cyclical time and mental resurrection. A potential problem with this conclusion is that Fard made no extant mention of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the central figure of Ghulat trends; nor did he make any explicit reference to the names of the Imams, the tragedy of Karbala', or Shī'ī books. There is no mention of a "race of devils" (except perhaps Gog and Magog) in Shī'ism, and certainly no mention of Yakub. Fard definitely borrowed doctrines from a range of religious groups, making it difficult for scholars to distinguish the ideas he was raised with from the ideas that he adopted in his time in America.

*Finding W.D. Fard* is a necessary resource for all those interested in the origins of the NOI. Morrow provides all the possible leads for future scholarship to pursue. Uncovering the identity of W.D. Fard would help us better understand the history of Islam in America. While the search is still on, Morrow's book is an invaluable tool to that end.