

2 Muslim Factions in Conflict

By ISSA EL KORASHI

For the past few years, Brooklyn residents have become alarmed and puzzled by shootouts among the Muslim groups in their midst. The latest incident was a gun battle at the Ya Sin Mosque, 52 Herkimer Place, in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section.

On the night of Feb. 4, five men, armed with shotguns and automatic pistols, invaded the Ya Sin mosque and fired into a group of Sunni Muslims. The fire was returned. Two of the invaders and two of the mosque's Muslims were shot to death, another Muslim was seriously injured. The surviving gunmen escaped. There was no explanation to police for the shooting.

Who are the Muslim's, and why the violence?

The word Muslim or Moslem comes from Islam, the faith based on the words and religious system founded in Arabia by the Prophet Muhammad early in the 7th century. It is a doctrine observed by one-seventh of the world's population, with over 500-million followers from Morocco to Indonesia.

Islam means "submission to God's will." The followers are monotheists, theologically conservative, with no structured clergy or missionary programs.

A number of Moslems came to the United States in the early 1900s, mainly for Syria and Lebanon, and settled on Atlantic Ave., near Borough Hall, in Brooklyn. Several groups moved on to Dearborn, Mich., and some settled in Toledo, Ohio, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Cedar Rapids Iowa.

500,000 in U.S.

There are about 500,000 Moslems in the U.S. Most are professional people and students in universities. The Majority are the so-called true Moslems or followers of Islam as it is still practiced in the Arab world.

The gathering place of true Moslems in New York is the Islamic Center at 1 Riverside Drive in Manhattan, headed by Sheikh Soliman Donia, a religious scholar who came from Egypt two years ago.

The center attracts Middle Eastern and Afro-Asian diplomats, as well as students, who go there occasionally for spiritual guidance. That group asserts that it has no political or social objectives, that it's interest is mainly religious knowledge.

A Leading Spokesman

These are not the militant Muslims you read about. They are mostly American black groups that adopted Islam in recent years. The violence is the result of various factions and leaders competing for followers.

Best known of these groups are the Black Muslims, organized in the 1930s by Elijah Muhammad, who is spokesman for a mem-



News photo

Police van waits in front of Ya Sin Mosque on the night of the shooting.

bership estimated at 100,000 to 200,000.

Muhammad became acquainted with Islam in 1932 when he shared a Michigan jail cell with a Syrian Moslem. He was impressed with the faith and decided to renovate it to fit the needs of the American black.

Splinter Groups Form

There are about 70 Black Muslim mosques around the country. The sect emphasizes black racial pride and a rejection of white Christian culture. Traditional Islamic leaders tend to repudiate the Black Muslims because, they say, the anti-white, segregationist philosophy is contrary to classic teaching.

Elijah Muhammad replies that Islam is a great religion but that it is still practiced exactly as it was at the time of the founder Mohammad 1,400 years ago. He believes he has adapted the philosophy to meet contemporary situations.

Recruiting Celebrates

The Black Muslims try hard to attract prominent blacks into their movement. In 1960, the recruited Cassius Clay, who was on his way to becoming world

boxing champion. He changed his name to Muhammad Ali.

In 1966, there was a rumor that former heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis was affiliated with the Black Muslims, but he denied it, stating that he could not accept the position "that all white folks are devils."

The movement flourished and is estimated to have assets today of about \$75 million. Some members began criticizing the luxurious life style which Elijah Muhammad and his sons adopted. Muhammad lives in a \$500,000 Chicago mansion and his sons and some of his aides reside in homes estimated to have cost from \$100,000 to \$350,000.

After the 1965 assassination in Washington Heights of Malcolm X, one of Muhammad's chief critics, splinter groups arose within the movement, accusing Muhammad of mismanaging organization funds.

A small number of followers left the Black Muslims and started their own sects. Among them are the Sunnis, who practice their belief from the Ya Sin Mosque in Bedford-Stuyvesant,

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Muslim Unit Came to U.S. In the 1900s

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where the shootout took place two weeks ago.

The Ya Sin Mosque has been a gathering spot and place of worship for a growing number of predominantly black Brooklynites who say they were converted to Orthodox Islam. "Sunnis" in Arabic means followers of the Prophet's way.

In one of their leaflets, the Sunnis answer the question, Why does mankind need Islam? by saying: "Islam is a system of brotherhood, truth, peace and justice before Allah (the creator of the universe). Islam orders man to organize himself against injustice, falsehood and all things that impede) love, peace and tranquility between man."

Since the shooting the mosque doors are locked and no one can enter without an examination. A recently hung poster on the wall says "This Place is Bugged." The leaders refuse to discuss the shootings and are reluctant to even speak of their religious beliefs and of Muhammad's sect.

One supporter of the Sunnis is Lew Alcindor, the noted basketball player known as Kareem Adul-Jabbar.

Eighteen months ago, violence broke out among Muslim prisoners on Rikers Island and 19 persons were hurt. Two prisoners



Elijah Muhammad

representing the Ya Sin, or the Orthodox Muslims, had an argument with the followers of Muhammad, who say they represent the "reform" faction of Islam. The argument resulted in the fight.

Two weeks ago, after the shootout at Ya Sin mosque, Muhammad's representative in New York, Louis Farrakhan, denied that Muhammad's followers were involved in the shooting.

There is another group of Moslems in Brooklyn, but they are peaceful. Their meeting place is the Islamic Mission of America, 143 State St. The director is a black called Sheikh Daoud Ahmed Faisal. He says he came from Grenada in 1913, and his family came originally from Morocco.

Sheikh Faisal, 83, teaches the Koran, Islam's bible, and issues Islamic birth certificates, marriage certificates and other documents to prove that the bearer is a Moslem.